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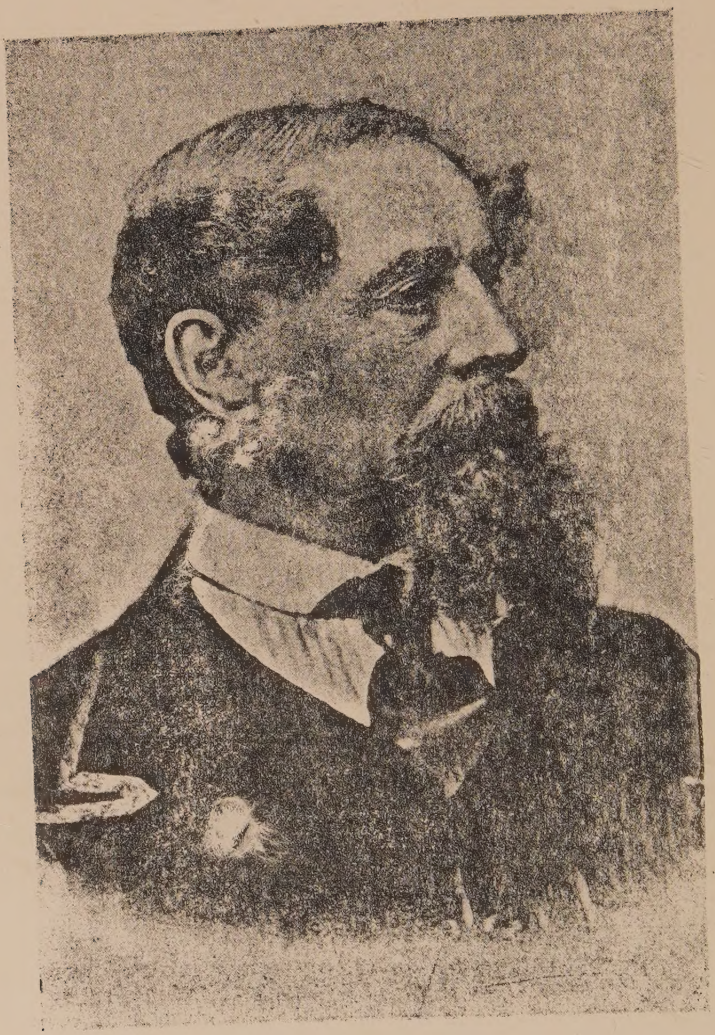
CHARLES DICKENS

(1812-1870)



CHARLES DICKENS

BY

ALBERT KEIM AND LOUIS LUMET

Translated from the French by

FREDERIC TABER COOPER

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
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CHARLES DICKENS

(1812-1870)

CHARLES DICKENS

CHAPTER I

FIRST DREAMS AND FIRST NIGHTMARES—A CHILD'S SOUL—THE JOYS OF POVERTY—MR. JOHN DICKENS-MICAWBER — LITTLE CHARLES DAVY

CHARLES DICKENS

Born the 7th February 1812
Died the 9th June 1870

SUCH is the inscription that may be read upon the novelist's tomb in Westminster Abbey, in the very heart of London, which his piercing glance had learned to read through all its fogs, and close beside the Thames, whose sombre waters and mysterious life he also painted, in the midst of a city full of distress and of hope, of mourning and of exquisite charity.

Charles Dickens, the date of his birth, the date of his death, then a period, and that is all. And it is enough. Phrases are unnecessary in the shadows and the mystery of that august necropolis, not far from the tombs of Händel, composer of archangelic harmonies, of Garrick, the Shakespearean actor, whose voice and gestures have ceased; of his friend and master, the penetrating moralist, Samuel Johnson, and of Macaulay, the gifted historian and essayist.

Charles Dickens is there; and yet, at the same time, he is and will continue to be everywhere in England. His spirit abides forever in the poetic intimacy of the British home, from the most sumptuous mansion to the most humble cottage. He brings tears and laughter to those lords of the earth whose injustice and hypocrisy he so often indignantly denounced, and he brings tears and laughter equally to the disinherited, in squalid hovels, littered with rags and tatters.

And the reason is that Dickens stooped low over the abyss of suffering, over the gulf of the

regrets, the privations, the haunting anxieties of the common people, at the same time that he sang so magnificently the pure and naïve joy, grotesque and yet sublime, of poverty, insanity, childhood and old age. He is English and he is of all other lands; but, first and foremost, he is English.

Of course, the writers of the realistic school have found grounds for criticism, and even for accusing him quite sharply of having exaggerated his human types and of having filled his vast and crowded works with a motley horde of freaks and caricatures.

As a matter of fact, Dickens's heroes, like those of Homer and Rabelais, Cervantes and Hugo, and even of Balzac himself, master though he was of realism, all contain some element of the enormous, the fantastic and the truculent. Instead of complaining of this, would it not be wiser to rejoice, because they are not merely individual and temporal characters, but belong to the general patrimony of humanity?

And what other writer may boast of having offered us so great a number of more or less plausible monsters, all the more diverting because their author has embroidered their vices or their simple physical and moral defects with the most delightful variations, thus allowing the reader to avenge himself, as it were, by whetting his teeth upon them as savoury morsels!

What a gallery of absurd and fragile figures, of sinister scoundrels and amusing scamps, of dwarfs and giants, and what an atmosphere of revolution and evangelization!

We pass from the petulant and indescribable fatalism of Pickwick, from the joviality of Major Bagstock, from the confident bohemianism of Micawber, the delicious kindliness of Peggotty, the innocence of Little Dorrit and many another adorable child, large and small (for there are many men who still are children, and Dickens himself was one of them, magical and sublime), down to the ignominy of Monks and

Uriah Heep, of Quilp and Squeers and Jonas Chuzzlewit.

Of course, Dickens's radicalism may be pleasing or displeasing to the partisans of different political factions, as being either excessive or over-moderate. But that need not concern us. The writer and the artist do not need to display a banner or formulate a definite platform. And, for that matter, the influence of Dickens in England, both from the pedagogical and social point of view, has been immense.

It is possible also to ridicule his happy endings, his concessions to the taste of the general public, both high and low, his manifold and crowded chapters, his faulty construction, his occasional somewhat coarse effects. But his excess of details does not alter the fact that they are often admirable. A high and sound morality emanates from all of these intense and prolonged spectacles.

As we wander in the company of Dickens among the good and the bad, as we study their hilarity and their melancholy, their honest or

crafty gestures, their follies, their attitudes, their contortions, at the sight of all this splendid, suffering, redoubtable humanity, all the more true at bottom because of its very exaggeration of the truth, we find ourselves sharing the emotion, the thrill, the ecstasy of the author himself in the presence of what is natural and pure.

Such is the journey which we are about to make, in a spirit of ardent sympathy, through the life and works of Dickens, each of which supplements the other. And we have no grounds for complaint of this, since his own physiognomy blends easily with that of certain of his heroes, spontaneous and impulsive beings, possessed of singular sensitiveness and exquisite humour.

We will not seek to explain the element of anxiety, tenderness and apprehension shared by him with a few of his most important characters. It will suffice if we see him such as he was, moving in the midst of his tyrants and victims, demons and angels, and shedding upon

them a lightning vengeance or the crowning halo of virtue.

"How was your son Charles educated?"

Such was the question that was put one day to John Dickens, the father of the novelist who had achieved so swift a celebrity.

"Hm, hm!" answered the old man, "you might say that he educated himself!"

And, indeed, it would certainly seem that Charles Dickens, like his hero, David Copperfield, received his chief training in the harsh school of life.

It is the wide-awake and thoughtful face of little David, with his earnest eyes and pretty curls, that most readily comes before us when we try to picture the childhood of little Charles. And how are we to conceive of Dickens the father otherwise than as wearing the immortal features of the optimistic and emphatic Wilkie Micawber, banishing grim reality with ambitious dreams and drowning his most sombre

resolutions in the delectable aroma of a bowl of punch?

Similarly, we see no reason why Mrs. Mary Gibson should not have borne some little resemblance to Peggotty; Charles used to come and sit in the kitchen, with a big book in his hand, just as dear little Davy did, to read his crocodile stories, after casting an anxious glance at the church, the graveyard and the deserted nests.

But one must mistrust the charm and the impressiveness of this romantic sort of autobiography, if one has regard for simple historic truth.

That Dickens constantly made use of actuality, of his memories, of his own personal experiences in regard to things and to people, for the purpose of creating types and painting environments is a striking and indisputable fact.

But, on the other hand, it is certain that the poet and the humorist in him have, each for his own purposes, singularly simplified and generalized the characters that they have drawn

and graven, to the end of making them more striking, in other words, more touching or more ridiculous. In like manner, Dickens's landscapes are adorned with all the high colouring of an ardent imagination. Accordingly it is necessary, while making occasional helpful comparisons, to avoid interpretations such as are too ingenious or open to question, and to keep in mind the fondness of this fantastic and irrepressible romanticist for what may be called the optical illusions of literature and the drama.

The autobiographic fragments which he employed in *David Copperfield* are neither extensive enough nor explicit enough to enable us to be sure of not falling into error in accepting these adventurous details. We may add that, even in his personal correspondence, the novelist did not deem it necessary to enter at any great length into the details of his private life, and that his best biographers, such as Ward and his friend Forster, deliberately maintain a truly British reserve on more than one point,

notwithstanding the interest of certain episodes and traits of character.

His birthplace was a house in Landport, on the island of Portsea. An inscription in large letters recalls the event, the birth of this same Charles Dickens, whose tender and powerful writings were destined to appeal to so many throbbing hearts: February 7th, 1812.

It is a humble house of the type common to the English provinces, a house like countless others in which countless obscure destinies have lain hidden. A tiny space of garden plot separates the front gate from the entrance. Two windows on the ground floor, little higher than the steps, two on the main floor, and then the attic.

John Dickens was employed in the Navy Pay Office. This Prodigal Father, as he was destined to be called later on by Dickens, in his letters, was earning at that time between eight hundred and a thousand dollars; but, although sincere and good-hearted—like the worthy Mr. Micawber—he delighted in giving himself up

to the soaring flights of his adventurous imagination. Too little emphasis has been placed, it would seem, on his tastes in reading and his love of the picturesque. There was nothing in him of the "rond-de-cuir," made famous in our modern literature; he was wholly bohemian, fantastic, naïve, generous and improvident, a man for whom life and irresponsible dreams are one and the same thing.

It should be noted also that his wife, who before marriage was Miss Elizabeth Barrow, does not seem to have had sufficient force of character to offset such dangerous effects, especially with so numerous a family, which consisted of eight children. Fanny was the oldest, Charles the second.

At the time of his birth the need of money had already begun to make itself felt in the household. Between the new responsibilities and the irregularity of their habits, they were destined to know a steadily augmenting poverty and want, notwithstanding that the father's salary was increased to seventeen or

eighteen hundred dollars. The lack of system became worse and worse, and the expenses multiplied. The Dickens household loved good cheer and good company, if only in order to forget the injustice of existing conditions on earth, the lawyers' writs and the noisy demands of creditors.

These are the features that must soon impress us in what we may call the cinematograph of Charles Dickens's early years. Forever haunted by the idea of bettering his home conditions, or, since comfort is not quite everything, of at least discôvering an atmosphere more congenial to his capricious and strongly exuberant nature, John Dickens formed the habit of changing his residence, and transporting his numerous brood and his naïve and extravagant hopes from one locality to another.

After various sojourns, notably in Norfolk Street, Bloomsbury, the family installed themselves at Chatham, a military station and a town of considerable importance, with more

than thirty thousand inhabitants, situated on the Medway, a tributary of the Thames.

How are we to picture the small Charles of that period? He seems to have been fair, pale and delicate. He was often ailing and sometimes ill. On several occasions he had attacks of convulsions. Who was to suspect that this pretty child would one day become an active, robust man, occasionally a great drinker, often a great entertainer, and always a great worker?

His childish charm attracted attention. He used to spend his days and evenings, seated in his high-chair, looking at pictures. At an early age his father would set him upon a table and bid him sing popular refrains and comic songs, which he rendered with a precocious cleverness that won him enthusiastic applause.

Expert psychologist that he is, Mr. Gilbert Chesterton, an English critic who, it should be noted, has assigned Dickens to his true place, has not failed to comment, in a tone at once judicial and ironical, upon this early attitude of Charles Dickens, fostered by father and mother

and the assembled friends and relatives, more intent for the most part upon amusement than upon irksome toil. Dickens was destined to remain throughout his life more or less in the condition of a child towards the end of an evening in which it has had a party, in other words, agreeable, joyous, delighted, but strongly overexcited and secretly almost on the point of tears.

Nevertheless, little Charles had a charming nature, frank and easily amused. As soon as his mother and aunt had between them taught him to read, he devoured all the works that fell into his hands. Each one of them was a discovery, especially when it proved to be a masterpiece of ironical savour, such as *Tom Jones*. And it is precisely here that little Charles foreshadows the later Dickens, namely a master of irony even beyond the border line of sentiment, in the midst of cries of grief and of revolt.

When Charles was not reading or playing with a magic lantern in company with boys of

his own age and with a pretty little girl named Lucy, whose hair was as golden as ripened grain—a gentle child whom he loved quite ingenuously—or when he was not singing some songs with his sister Fanny, he was forever exploring the surrounding country.

We must needs follow him in thought along those Kentish highways. What ecstasies he enjoyed before the green expanse of wide horizons! What strange folk, with gargoyle faces and fantastic trappings, he brushed shoulders with: tramps, peddlers, hostlers, rogues and revellers of every class and every species!

His father once took him to the slope of Gad's Hill, and the gigantic shade of Falstaff rose before their imagination. The spot filled the boy with wondering delight, and he dreamed of some day owning the house and park on the side of the hill.

"Work!" said the Prodigal Father, always more willing to preach than to practise, "and all this will belong to you."

Even at this distance we can still see Mr.

Micawber, undaunted by his perpetual burden of debts, making one of his magnificent gestures, to emphasize his prediction. As a matter of fact, Gad's Hill was destined to be Dickens's favourite retreat and final home. As has been rightly observed, notwithstanding a nervous energy fertile in impulses and unforeseen manifestations, under the spur of an imagination that seemed incapable of control, he really possessed, in addition to his overwhelming activity, a good deal of method in his ideas.

Chapter II of *David Copperfield* is entitled: "I Observe." At Chatham Charles Dickens passed his time in roaming and observing. One day he went to a theatre and found it an amazing revelation. Grimaldi, the clown to whom he later devoted one of his first books, astonished him by his grimaces.

The famous novelist, who throughout his life retained a freedom of manners, disdaining to fill the pretentious rôle of high-priest of letters, would willingly play the clown to amuse his children and family. He habitually retained a

weakness for simple and natural comedy. He never hesitated to give the preference to childish merriment rather than to hypocritical solemnity.

In those days at Chatham Charles was free and happy. But he was steadily growing, and one day his father asked himself why the boy should not be receiving some sort of systematic instruction. Accordingly, in 1821, he was entrusted to a certain teacher named Giles, who was delighted with the precociousness of a pupil as tractable as he was gifted with memory and understanding.

The following year this sensitive and winning boy-dreamer, whose mind ripened early, wrote a tragedy entitled *Misnar, the Sultan of India.*

It is sometimes dangerous to comment upon the early efforts of famous men, and it is so easy, for the sake of proving our case, to persuade ourselves that we have been able to search far back and find manifestations of genius in the bud. But we may at least record the fact that Dickens began to give signs of his

vocation at an early age. Does that mean that it might have been predicted on the basis of his first boyish efforts? We must not exaggerate. As a matter of fact, he showed himself eager to learn, first for the sake of learning, and then—why not admit it?—for the sake of shining before his family and the world at large. Little Charles was a boy quite as remarkable for his ambition and self-esteem as for his eager intelligence and his keen emotion before the beauties of nature and the recital of fine stories which little by little fired his imagination.

While Charles abandoned himself to the delights of the *Spectator*, and Daniel Defoe and Oliver Goldsmith, his father continued to form vast projects and discourse upon them at great length, but he lost his situation. The black shadow of want descended upon the household; for neither John Dickens nor his wife was capable of struggling successfully against hunger and despair.

They took the coach for London and sent their meagre household effects by water. Si-

multaneously with debts and ruin, mourning entered the saddened home; they lost one of their children. And the others cried and wept.

Mrs. Dickens—we almost said Mrs. Micawber—having had some little education, conceived an idea: an idea that no doubt seemed to her husband as a stroke of genius. On a humble little house front in the North End of the city she put out the following sign: *Mrs. Dickens's Establishment for Young Ladies.* Did not this promise a means of salvation, a protection from the hideous bankruptcy which had overtaken her husband and forced him to lodge at the expense of the State?

Naturally, no young girls ventured to ask Mrs. Dickens to inculcate the principles of letters, sciences and the art of social deportment. Since little Charles had engaging manners, pretty eyes, assurance and a pleasing smile, it fell to his lot to be sent around to the various tradesmen, to try to effect some understanding with them, and beg them to be conciliatory and patient.

It was a thankless task; but another still more thankless awaited the proud lad, eager for distinction and success, when it became necessary for him to go knocking at obscure doors in the depths of sinister back alleys, in quest of pawnbrokers and money lenders.

In order to obtain a wretched subsistence for his brothers and sisters, now reduced to rags, Charles was forced to sell the last trifling objects of value, even the kitchen utensils. He wrangled with rapacious second-hand dealers, crafty-eyed individuals who were pleased not only to enrich themselves at the expense of the unfortunate, but to torture them into the bargain. Consequently no other novelist, with the exception of Balzac, has so well succeeded in picturing these human birds of prey, their ruses and their ignominious cupidity.

While Charles continued to fulfil these lamentable duties as best he could, and at the same time strove to interest certain persons of benevolent aspect in the fate of this numerous and ruined family, Mr. John Dickens, after

having long cut an imposing figure, in close-buttoned frock coat, and with cane in hand, now appealed to every possible saint, without succeeding in moving them.

He consoled himself in the debtors' prison of the Marshalsea by delivering high-sounding tirades which won him the admiration of his companions in misfortune. He discussed with them, he organized a sort of syndicate among them, he planned to vanquish adverse fortune through the weight of his own superiority. The philosophy of John Dickens—or of Mr. Micawber!—is exquisite, and on the whole fairly practical. He played the part of victim, proudly and admirably. He had not a penny with which to bless himself, but he had the wealth of his ideas, his imagination, his renunciation, his serenity rising superior to the cruelty of fate!

His family consoled themselves less easily. How were they to vanquish adversity? Fanny, Charles's oldest sister, entered the Royal Academy of Music. In course of time she won a prize, and when that day came, Charles, al-

though not jealous, felt that his heart was on the point of breaking. To him it was a distressful, utterly discouraging day. And the reason? Simply that at this very time young Dickens himself was still climbing his Calvary. That epoch of his life was so painful that he never afterwards dared to look it in the face, but did his best to forget it.

Later, a long time later, his intimate friend and biographer, Forster, spoke to him of a workman who claimed to have known him in a blacking manufactory, not far from the Hungerford Market. Dickens answered with an evasive "yes." Subsequently he sought a meeting with Forster and revealed the whole lamentable episode, a dark and infernal nightmare in the course of his otherwise rapid ascension towards success and fame. A nightmare as black as the blacking contained in the bottles upon which he was obliged to paste labels carefully and rapidly, throughout long and atrocious days! He made a further allusion to it when he placed David Copperfield with the firm

DICKENS AT DIFFERENT AGES

Above: "Boz" (his pseudonym at the outset) at the age of twenty-three, from the portrait by Lawrence.—At the age of thirty-four, from a miniature by Margaret Gillie. *Below:* In 1856, from a portrait by Frith.—In 1845, in the rôle of Captain Bobadil, from the portrait by C. R. Leslie.

of Murdstone & Grinby before he became a pupil of Dr. Strong.

At all events we know that he was employed by the Lamert Brothers, distant relatives of Mrs. Dickens and manufacturers of shoe blacking, at a weekly salary of six shillings. Charles, who, young as he was, already loved the beautiful, the artistic and the ideal, must needs clip the wings of his youthful and fervent imagination, in order to spend his days crouching over bottles in a gloomy workroom in a foul basement, and, what was worse, behind a window where, in an agony of humiliation, he drew an admiring crowd of idlers by the swiftness and dexterity of his movements.

Does this mean that Charles disliked work and was not anxious to contribute to the relief of his family? Not by any means. He even strove to do carefully and zealously what was given him to do. But he suffered from the degradation of such employment and surroundings. He suffered from the effort that it cost him all the time to keep from breaking down

altogether, overcome with grief and shame. He suffered also from hunger, cold and loneliness. He had a tender, expansive, exuberant nature that pined in solitude; for he remained alone, even in the midst of his companions in the workroom, for they were coarse and little fitted to understand him.

Meanwhile John Dickens was becoming more and more convinced that a debtors' prison was an acceptable refuge from the vicissitudes of life; he occupied his leisure by counting the holes in the ceiling, with a sentimental and detached air. It was not long before his family came to share his captivity in the Marshalsea. Charles, however, did not live with the family. He had a room—and what a wretched room it was!—in the house of an old woman, more or less closely resembling the Mrs. Pichpin whom he so rigorously pictured in one of his novels.

He was now twelve years of age and thrown entirely on his own resources. He sadly and furtively consumed his sausages and pudding, and profited by his hours of leisure to wander

about and study things and people. It was at this period that he discovered the delight of the Street and the Passing Show, and dreamed through the evening under the street lamps. London Bridge, Holborn, Whitechapel and Charing Cross no longer had secrets for him. What joy, when he could escape from the blacking warehouse, a jail a thousand times more hideous to him than the debtors' prison (where at least he enjoyed a faint shadow of home comfort on Sundays) and could watch, in a sort of real and tangible fairyland, as though in a waking dream, the hurried passage of belated pedestrians, or paused before the knocker of an old door, or at the foot of a statue, or at the entrance to some church or park! What a multitude of types he saw! And how he was piling up, without knowing it, a great store of emotions, confused, yet so intense that they made him forget his own troubles, the monotony of his existence, and all the anxieties which were his portion, poor lonely boy, infinitely well meaning, infinitely apprehensive and

distressed. Yes, he was poor, beyond question, and lost in the midst of the indifferent crowd. But none the less he had his hours of chimerical joy. And no one has ever succeeded better in analysing the touching and grotesque delight of the starving at a feast, of the deserted who have found friends, of the desperate who have begun to hope again. What is the happiness of ordinary well-filled, contented folk in comparison with these strange joys?

On one occasion young Dickens—as, later, his own David Copperfield—carrying his piece of bread under his arm, carefully enveloped in paper as if some rare book, like a true gentleman, boldly entered the Alamode Beef-house in Clare Court. He took his seat in the best dining-room, and with much dignity ordered a portion of beef. The man who served him stared at him as though he had been some curious animal, and pointed him out to the other waiter. But no matter; it was a real feast.

Little Charles took his leave quite calmly and majestically, leaving a halfpenny as a tip.

During the period of his inferno there were other similar glimpses of paradise. They were like oases in the desert, one and all of them constituting strong impressions that he was destined later to pass on to his characters. For he knew these characters already, intimately, long before he gave them life—such intense, quivering, hallucinating life!

On another occasion he—and David after him—entered a public house. The landlord was somewhat disconcerted at the unexpected sight of this small and youthful customer.

"What is your very best—the VERY *best*—ale, a glass?" asked Charles.

"Twopence."

"Then just draw me a glass of that, if you please, with a good head to it."

The landlord, much amused, beckoned to his wife. They both proceeded to ask a number of friendly questions of this boy with such a self-reliant manner. He answered them cau-

tiously, determined not to be too communicative. They ended by serving him a very mild ale and something to eat besides, and the landlord's wife could not resist kissing him when he left. Oh, that good ale and that good meal! Among all the great banquets to which he was destined to be invited later and at which he was to be entertained like a hero of dreams and fairyland, Charles Dickens would never meet with food or drink that tasted better.

Yet these intermissions, these moments of forgetfulness and naïve pleasure, could not make up for the drudgery of the blacking warehouse. His health remained delicate. One morning, when he was employed in closing the jars of blacking he was overcome with dizziness. He tried to fight off the feeling, but, with all his strength of will, he had to succumb to it. Another of the lads employed there, Robert by name, who had hitherto made Dickens the butt of rather coarse witticisms, set to work to tend him with that admirable devotion which is so often met with among the lower orders

utterly lacking in other refinements. Accordingly Robert, more familiarly known as Bob, arranged Charles comfortably on a bed of straw and applied wet cloths to his head.

When evening came Bob, whose devotion knew no halfway measures, insisted upon accompanying his sick comrade home. At this point begins what one of Dickens's best biographers calls a "tragi-comedy." The two lads were, each of them, equally obstinate. Charles would have allowed himself to be chopped in pieces sooner than admit that his home and that of his family was in the notorious debtors' prison. Consequently, sick and weak as he was, he led Bob from street to street, quite at random, and finally stopped before a house of respectable appearance. Then, after thanking Bob, he ascended the steps and entered the vestibule. He got out of his dilemma, when the servant came to the door, by asking for the first person whose name occurred to him, which happened to be that of his unconscious persecutor,

Bob. After which he fled in hot haste to the Marshalsea.

Fortune favours the brave. But the goddess is so capricious that from time to time she also favours the improvident. Mr. Dickens, thanks to an unexpected inheritance, found himself liberated from prison and for the time being guaranteed from want.

Charles had already pleaded his cause with his father. His one purpose in life was to escape from his inferno, to leave the blacking warehouse. A quarrel, which arose between Mr. Dickens and Mr. Lamert, the director of the manufactory, resulted in setting him free. Mrs. Dickens, who was quite pitiless, advised her husband to apologise, but the latter, weak though he usually was, had the good sense not to yield.

Charles was now sent to the Wellington House Academy. Instruction seems to have held a smaller place there than canings administered magisterially by a certain Mr. Jones,

who, all things considered, was probably less brutal than Creakles in *David Copperfield.*

An American writer, Mr. Hughes, has proved convincingly that Charles Dickens has exercised a real and lasting influence on modern pedagogy in England. He heaped ridicule upon the hateful and cruel monitors who avenged their own failures upon the children committed to their care, and he cast discredit upon corporal punishment as a process of education.

But at all events matters could not have been so terrible in a school in which Charles, in conjunction with one of his comrades, was able to found a school paper, and where he revelled in private theatricals. He was both stage director and chief actor. We must bear in mind that in after years Dickens frequently indulged in this same pastime. However, he never indulged in it except as an amateur. Yet, it is asserted that he had all the qualities essential to success upon the stage. In his famous readings he was always far less a reader than an astonishing comedian.

Charles did not remain long at the Wellington House Academy. His comrades remembered him as a likeable boy, good-mannered, quick-witted and easily excitable. He seems to have done less studying than his hero, David, or rather he did not stay long enough at the school to show what his real talents were.

He was now fifteen years old, but the family's slender resources would not permit of his preparing to enter the university. Besides, it was time that he began to earn his living. Misfortune had given him a singular maturity, in addition to his naïve charm and his desire to raise himself through reflection and persevering efforts. We shall soon find him on the road to fame and fortune, a fairly short road in his case, though not lacking in a few serious obstacles. But, like David Copperfield, young Charles was destined to surmount them. He went steadily on, at a joyous pace, towards the vast horizons which awaited him.

CHAPTER II

OFFICE BOY, REPORTER, STENOGRAPHER—THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A SENTIMENTAL HISTORY—THE BEST FRIEND OF CHARLES DICKENS, WHOSE NAME IS BOZ

CHARLES DICKENS is the appealing psychologist of meditative and unhappy childhood, hungry for tenderness and love, childhood petted by the few, and chiefly by the simple-hearted, who often are also the humblest, but misunderstood and tyrannised over by the rest.

Infinitely sensitive himself, he had only to recall his own wretched loneliness, the harsh, repellent faces which surrounded him, the environments from which he suffered and his misinterpreted longing for affection, in order to be sincere and pathetic.

Charles Dickens is also the psychologist, de-

liberately stern and relentless, of the men of law.

A certain London attorney, Edward Blackmore, with whom young Charles served as clerk after having spent some time in the office of a solicitor in New Square, declared in the course of an interview:

"I have seen a good many of his heroes, and I may add that I remember them perfectly well."

At all events, at the age of sixteen, Charles, who possessed a good handwriting and a quite creditable orthography, was fulfilling the duties of an attorney's office boy, a profession upon which he afterwards avenged himself by riddling it with the shafts of his satire. It was this experience which enabled him to invent such monsters as Wobbler, Chuckster and Lowten, and to use his scalpel as analyser and social reformer, for the purpose of dissecting the anatomy of their barbaric instincts, their misshapen thoughts, their corroded hearts.

In dim-lit offices, upon which there seemed

to rest the weight of dusty centuries of mournful customs and traditions, he initiated himself into the principles of the law, and more especially of legal procedure. He passed insensibly from humanity bygone and vanished to humanity present and future.

While he had a clear vision of the conquerors and the conquered in all these redoubtable struggles for life, he also had an intuitive sense of all the secret dramas which might be read between the lines of jargon that overspread the pages of contracts and sealed documents.

What ambuscades he discovered, long before he began to denounce them, in these laboratories of legal cunning, in which the inexperienced and luckless wight is only too often captured, and destined to struggle wretchedly like a fly in a spider's web!

Charles none the less punctually performed his monotonous task as attorney's clerk with all the more eagerness, because he had not the slightest wish to advance in that career. He seemed to know intuitively that he was simply

covering one stage of his life as an observer of men. He knew that it would not be long before he would escape from this new jail, in which he at least had the pleasure of seeing and mentally "picking the bones" of some singular and characteristic types.

As a matter of fact, after working all day he continued to work well into the night. He had taken up the study of stenography. At that period, owing to the lack of any really practical method, it required a long and complex study to assimilate a rather alarming quantity of conventional signs. But his father had already secured a good position on a newspaper as shorthand reporter in the House of Commons.

John Dickens? The former prisoner in the Marshalsea? Yes, why not? But through what lucky chance? Or is it possible, after all, that the Micawber element in his character had not really harmed the elder Dickens? There is a question that we may ask ourselves, and an enigma that we need not attempt to solve. But let us remember that John Dickens

was capable, if not of perseverance, at least of ingenuity.

Charles wished to become a writer. In any case it was an ambition which his passion for work justified. Now, he foresaw, and not without reason, that the profession of reporter and editor was at least a stepping-stone towards authorship, possibly towards popularity as an author.

To become popular! To be applauded! Well, why not? This project for escaping from obscurity and obtaining a speedy fame undoubtedly haunted him. First, he must not rust away in those sinister law offices, where the present was lugubrious and the future speculative; secondly, he must achieve popularity by revealing to others what he had already discovered in the depths of his own being. Such was the condition of his mind at this period.

But what was he to do? What should be his first step? He wrote to the directors of the Royal Opera at Covent Garden, with a certain amount of naïveté, because he made it clear

that he was nobody at all, that he was keenly anxious to become somebody, and that he thought he had the necessary qualifications to interest and to please.

Undoubtedly it was the ingenuousness of the letter which won favour, for they accorded him an interview and named a day. When the day came Charles, sick and shivering with fever, was forced to keep his bed. He wrote again, explaining and anxiously begging for another appointment. Another date was agreed upon. But before it arrived Charles, who had already acquired considerable skill in stenography, held a position as reporter on the *True Sun*. Otherwise, who knows whether he might not have become a great actor? Consequently we need not regret this circumstance to which it is by no means impossible that we owe the immortal masterpieces of Charles Dickens.

Let us, in passing, pay our respects to that skill in stenography, which the novelist himself characterises as a measure of desperation, and which permitted him, as it did his own

David Copperfield, to find his way through journalism to his true path.

He was assigned, at the outset, to report cases tried in the Court of Chancery. In vacation time, which he spent in the neighbourhood of Chatham, and whenever he could spare time to visit the British Museum, where it was possible to make comparison of the different systems, he spent hour after hour plunged in shorthand manuals.

Unquestionably this was a hard apprenticeship for his exuberant imagination. But in attempting to restore to life the ardent physiognomy of Dickens, a man of such exaggerated sensitiveness and nervous susceptibility that he was capable of being so moved by his own recitals as to lack the courage to continue them, or to write them over, or reread them, we must constantly remind ourselves that this same man was endowed with an extraordinary strength of will.

It seems odd to discover in him, side by side, on the one hand, what may be called his somer-

saults of impulsiveness, his very pronounced fondness for keen witticisms and even for broadly farcical horse-play; and, on the other hand, a tenacity of purpose, a veritable obsession for continuing his task and acquitting himself of it with a maximum of perfection and success.

It means little to us, no doubt, to know today that the author of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist* was a past master in stenography. Nevertheless, it must be noted that all of his fellow reporters agreed upon this point. Furthermore, it should be added that he distinguished himself quite as much in the capacity of journalist and editor.

Thanks to his impetuosity, his conscientious determination to do his very utmost, and his natural need of activity, even riotous activity, he made an ideal reporter. Towards his twentieth year his health had become better and permitted him to undergo long periods of fatigue, veritable prodigies of physical and mental effort.

As parliamentary reporter he rapidly acquired the confidence of his colleagues on the *True Sun,* as was proved when they appointed him as spokesman to present their claim for an increase in salaries to the business manager of the paper; and his successful pleading won their cause.

Accordingly we find that Charles Dickens took the profession of journalism quite seriously and fulfilled his functions with an adroit and impassioned zeal. A journalist! He was destined always to be more or less a journalist throughout his life. Even his novels were published in installments. And on many an occasion he had inspirations well worthy of a true journalist and magazine editor.

Accordingly we need not be surprised at hearing him, in the course of an address to the journalists of America, pay an eloquent tribute to that profession, to which he gave the credit for his first literary successes.

Undoubtedly he spoke more truly than he knew. Being not merely a reporter, but a re-

porter endowed with genius, he noted with an amazing precision of detail the people whom he saw and knew, and whose purposes he fathomed and whose inmost depths he scrutinised with his penetrating glance. It is these portraits which he afterwards gave back to us, set in their natural frames; for man and his environment are best explained the one by the other.

His bitter spirit of revolt, which he had masked under emotion and tears, expanded in contact with that public and political life which the young parliamentary reporter was required, by virtue of his very duties, to seize in the heat of action, and in which his clear-sighted radicalism and his polemical zeal found an early opportunity for profitable employment.

In the most sordid quarters of the capital, haunted by beggars, ragamuffins and cripples, the whole anonymous mass of the wretched and ill-fated, he succeeded in a certain sense in laying his finger on each and all of the sufferings of the people. He felt the quivering soul of

the populace, among whom there is quite as much of unguessed nobility and admirable resources as there is of its only too real infamy.

Accordingly, he was not likely to be more indulgent towards statesmen than towards men of the law. Just as he had once seen in flesh and blood the prototype of Sampson Brass and willingly exalted him, in order that his fall should be the greater, so also he perceived from his reporter's seat in the House of Lords or of Commons the dummy figures of his Circumlocution Office.

The trio of Barnacles was no product of his imagination. As a writer for the populace, how could he fail to compare the pretentious nullity or indifference of certain men in high places with the needs and demands of the crowds of the oppressed?

Was it not while he was still a modest parliamentary reporter, and because he was the echo of all sorts of sorrows and iniquities, that he began to draw up his simple, vehement, terrible indictment against powerful but inert person-

ages and solemn but ineffective institutions, like the rhetoric of far too great a number of politicians?

And it is precisely this great novelist and educator in whom the spirit of caricature tends to unite more and more with the spirit of reform and with a very human creed of justice and charity.

Thus our young Charles continued to win distinction in his arduous calling of short-hand reporter. His maternal uncle, who for some years had been editor of *The Mirror of Parliament,* offered him the same position that he was then filling on the *True Sun;* so that, at the age of twenty, he was earning between eighty and a hundred dollars a month, at the cost of considerable but not uncongenial toil. In point of fact, he acquired a certain reputation in his own circle, which chose to extol his professional ability.

At all events, in 1825, it earned him a place, with analogous duties, on an important paper, the *Morning Chronicle,* where he succeeded in

covering his assignments only at the cost of limitless activity.

To be sure, he was generously recompensed. When he was obliged to go to various widely separated spots, to take notes of political gatherings, the expense bills which he handed in to the worthy managers of the *Morning Chronicle* were not even disputed; for instance, six different repairs to his post-chaise for a journey of six miles, or the cost of cleaning a cloak that was covered with candle grease because he was obliged to write in his carriage at night while the horses were galloping.

Dickens's biographers, both English and French, have all insisted upon the exhausting nature of a reporter's life, and notably M. Hervier in his excellent work upon a writer whose character attracts us no less than his novels.

Here is what Dickens himself subsequently said upon this subject:

"I have often transcribed for the printer, from my shorthand notes, important public

speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of night. . . . The very last time I was at Exeter I strayed into the castle yard there, to identify, for the amusement of a friend, the spot on which I once 'took,' as we used to call it, an election speech of Lord John Russell, at the Devon contest, in the midst of a lively fight maintained by all the vagabonds in that division of the county, and under a pelting rain. . . . I have worn my knees by writing on them, on the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen, in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep. . . . Returning home from exciting political meetings in the country to the writing press in London, I do verily believe that I have been

upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been, in my time, belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken coach boys, and have got back in time for publication."

Desirous of handing down to his critics and to posterity whatever it was his duty to leave to them, and nothing more, Charles Dickens decided, on a certain day of depression, at his Gad's Hill home, to destroy a considerable quantity of papers. We have the proof of this in a note which he addressed to one of his friends:

"I observe day by day the abuse that is made of confidential letters. They are printed for a public that has no concern with them. That is why, a short time ago, I built a great fire on my grounds and burned all the letters in my possession. At present I destroy all that I receive aside from business letters. In this way I can rest tranquil."

Without wishing to dwell upon the defects or short-comings of great men, and without any intention of entering upon useless inquiries and debatable interpretations, it is permissible for men of letters to express regret for hecatombs of this nature.

Fortunately, John Forster—who, like Dickens, was on the staff of the *True Sun*—did not fail to preserve the correspondence addressed to him for upwards of forty years by this deeply beloved and deeply admired friend. On the other hand, we find here and there documents which are not always in themselves sufficient to enlighten us regarding the intimate and emotional life of this tender-hearted novelist.

We have already remarked elsewhere that one must be careful not to take the confessions of David Copperfield too literally, and that in reading such a book as this, containing so many personal impressions, it is generally necessary to make allowances for the romance of fiction and the various exigencies of detail.

It is quite evident, for example, that the frail,

pale mother of Davy, and the slave of her second husband, has nothing in common with the mother of Charles Dickens.

In many cases, owing to the silence of the writer, and the habitual discretion and reserve of English authors, we are reduced to hypotheses. And such hypotheses are likely to be either too timid or too adventurous. Nevertheless we may be enlightened upon certain points by testimony that is not only convincing but of a really compelling interest.

In reading *David Copperfield,* one is especially struck with the frivolous and delicious charm, somewhat affected and wholly captivating, of dainty Dora, the hero's first wife, his child-wife.

It is easy to divine (and Mr. J. C. Anderson has stated that in 1857 everyone was agreed upon this point) that Dickens had intended to draw a more or less close picture of his wife in the person of the serious Agnes, the sensible second wife of Davy, too sensible perhaps, and at the same time too lacking in sentiment.

But how about Dora, little Dora, who could do nothing but play with her dog, and sing and wear shepherdess hats and die?

There are too many pretty touches, the picture of her is too lovingly composed not to have had its replica in real life. And, as a matter of fact, Dora was not merely a pretty creation of genius; she really lived. And, what is more, she lived long enough for Dickens to write to her nearly a quarter of a century after the close of their idyll. But, instead of anticipating, let us hasten to add that the idyll in question is altogether most charmingly idyllic, yet, at the same time, so far as the great and unhappy novelist was concerned, profoundly dramatic. There are sobs and tears and quivering nerves in his books, because there had been the same in his own life.

Dora was not known as Dora, but as Maria Beadnell. She was the daughter of a banker; she had two sisters, and she lived in London, in the City, No. 2 Lombard Street.

Let us put aside the delicate vision furnished

by the novel, and let us see instead what took place in reality.

Charles Dickens was then nineteen years old, and had entered upon his career as stenographer and reporter, fairly creditably for that matter. This was in the year 1834. He had formed a friendship with a bank clerk, Kolle by name. The latter introduced him to the Beadnell family.

Charles, who was good-looking and bore an air of distinction, had no sooner seen Maria Beadnell than he fell in love with her and proceeded to pay court to her with much ardour and tenderness. The Beadnells were by no means overjoyed at this pretty love affair. They possessed considerable means, and their one thought was to live beyond the reach of material cares. Unquestionably, Charles cut a good figure, and he had all sorts of brilliant qualities. He might, perhaps, make his way in the world. But what guarantee could a young man of his years offer? His position as a reporter was insecure and not to be considered.

The future? No one could predict the future. Besides, Maria was extremely attractive; she might well aspire to a far better match.

Like the worldly-wise parents that they were, they decided to send Maria to France for a time to finish her education in Paris. There is reason to believe that Maria's heart was not untroubled by Charles's poetic avowals. He himself was seriously in love and desperately unhappy. He remained in London, but he could not forget her—and he never would. This early idyll is either disregarded or lightly dismissed—a big mistake in either case.

Maria returned to England. Her parents kept a watchful eye upon her. But why should she not renew the romance with her young lover? She loved him after her own fashion, which included nothing very profound or passionate. Undoubtedly, in her young and pretty eyes, it was little more than a play, a pleasant flirtation. And all the more so—since secrets are always delightful—because she carried on a clandestine correspondence with

Charles, thanks to Kolle, who was free to visit her home in Lombard Street both formally and informally, and had every hope of marrying one of her sisters, as he subsequently did.

The pretty secret of this correspondence is revealed to us in the following note written to Kolle by young Dickens and published by Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, one of his best informed biographers:

"I have been asked, in a line which reached me this morning, to send my reply by the same means as was employed for my former letter. So I take the liberty of asking you if you will be so kind as to deliver the note herewith enclosed when you go today to pay your usual afternoon call."

Yes, it was a very simple and fervent love that Dickens felt for Maria Beadnell. His letters, full of ardent declarations, recently published with lengthy comments by Professor George P. Baker, of Harvard University, leave no doubt upon that score.

We must make allowance for the ardour and

frankness of youth; but listen to what he says a little later:

"I have never loved, and I never can love, any human creature breathing but yourself. . . . The love I now tender you is as pure and as lasting as at any period of our former correspondence. . . . My feeling on *one* subject was early roused; it has been strong, and it will be lasting."

We hardly have a right to laugh at these youthful vows, and we shall soon see why.

Maria's parents had meanwhile become aware of the secret courtship, and apparently they intervened with considerable energy and compelled their daughter to break it off squarely, brutally, definitely. She gave him his dismissal in a cold little letter full of reproaches. Who knows whether her family did not collaborate in it?

Charles kept aloof. Miss Maria Beadnell became the wife of Henry Louis Winter, a wealthy merchant. We shall see that Dickens was soon to marry in his turn, and that this marriage was

HOUSES MADE FAMOUS BY DICKENS

Above: Dickens' birthplace, in the poorer quarter of Portsea.—Doughty Street, his residence from 1837 to 1840, where the celebrated *Pickwick Papers* were written. *Below:* "The Old Curiosity Shop," which he immortalized in the novel of the same name.

not destined to be altogether a happy one. If Maria-Dora was too frivolous, Catherine-Agnes was destined to prove, as some one has remarked, too methodical.

Have we attached undue importance to this idyll, or are we sure that Dickens drew an idealized portrait of his early love when he drew that of Dora? Yes, absolutely sure, for Dickens himself said so, in a letter written to Mrs. Winter herself, more than twenty years later.

In 1855 he received a letter from Mrs. Winter, in which she evoked the memories of youth. The famous novelist's reply betrays a poignant yet controlled emotion, quite apparent behind its proud and dignified tone. It seems that one evening, while the illustrious author of *David Copperfield* was reading at a corner of his fireside, a bundle of letters was laid upon his table. He was in the habit of receiving hundreds of them every day. He cast a glance over the envelopes. Not one of these letters bore the handwriting of a friend. He laid them

aside, in order to resume his tranquil reading. But his mind wandered. Why should it do so? After all the years that had slipped away, his thoughts winged their way back to the days of his youth. He was surprised at himself. Nothing in his surroundings, nor in what he had been reading, could explain these flocking memories. Suddenly a suspicion seized him. He looked over his letters once more. And he felt a thrill. But let him tell it in his own words:

". . . suddenly the remembrance of your hand came upon me with an influence that I cannot express to you. Three or four and twenty years vanished like a dream, and I opened it with the touch of my young friend David Copperfield when he was in love. . . . I have forgotten nothing of those old times. They are just as still and plain and clear as if I had never been in a crowd since and had never seen or heard my own name out of my own house. . . . You so belong to the days when the qualities that have done me most good

since were growing in my boyish heart that I cannot end my answer to you lightly. The associations my memory has with you make your letter more—I want a word—invest it with a more immediate address to me than such a letter could have from anybody else."

Upon reflection we realise that the foregoing is almost too literary, it has a certain suggestion of stage effects. Yet perhaps it means that he really did suffer, that he was still as keenly sensitive as ever! How cruelly wounded he must have been! Who would dare to suggest that he had felt nothing more than a vague liking for that Maria who had been the dream of his twentieth year, the exquisite and futile Dora of his novel?

So, after this long separation, the correspondence was resumed. Could it be that Dickens was anxious to convince himself that he had not changed since the old days? Did he not have a secret longing to quiver with the old emotions after so many, many years, as he bent over a love that was forever quenched, above

a flame that was smothered under ashes? Yes, beyond question, Dora was she, and he was David Copperfield.

"People used to say to me how pretty all that was, and how fanciful it was, and how elevated it was above the little foolish loves of very young men and women. But they little thought what reason I had to know it was true, and nothing more nor less."

Attention! Here we have the confession of his love, a great cry from the depths of his heart:

"Whatever of fancy, romance, energy, passion, aspiration and determination belong to me, I have never separated and never shall separate from the hard-hearted little woman—you—whom it is nothing to say I would have died for, with the greatest alacrity! . . . It is a matter of perfect certainty to me that I began to fight my way out of poverty and obscurity, with one perpetual idea of you. . . . My entire devotion to you, and the wasted tenderness of those hard years which I have

ever since half dreaded to recall, made so deep an impression on me that I refer to it a habit of suppression which now belongs to me and which I know is no part of my original nature. . . . These are things that I have locked up in my own heart and that I never thought to bring out any more. . . . The dream which I lived in did me good, refined my heart and made me patient and persevering. . . . And if the dream were all of you—as God knows it was—how can I receive a confidence from you and return it, and make a feint of blotting all this out?"

Mrs. Winter and Dickens continued to exchange letters, but without meeting. Mr. Winter's business affairs were going badly, and ended in bankruptcy. She turned to the friend of long ago, the friend for always. What a drama!

He had not yet seen her, but he still pictured her as she used to be in the hours of their exquisite idyll. She protested, she assured him that she was old, ugly, toothless; he could not

believe her. The house in Lombard Street, the very bricks and mortar, were crumbling into dust. But not she, the well beloved! Let us cite one more passage from Dickens himself. Nothing is more touching, as Pascal has said, than to find a man inside of an author:

"I see you in a sort of raspberry-coloured dress with a little black trimming at the top—black velvet it seems to be made of—cut into vandykes—an immense number of vandykes—with my boyish heart pinned like a captured butterfly on every one of them."

That is Dickens at his biggest and best, in his very highest manner. Emotion, in this admirable writer, is veiled under picturesque detail.

The end of this love story is quite melancholy. Charles Dickens at last meets Dora again, or rather, alas, not Dora, but Mrs. Winter. And he sees her as she is, and far different from the young girl of his glorious and vanished dream.

Henceforward Dora is transformed. She be-

comes Flora in *Little Dorrit,* for Mr. Casby is none other than Maria's father, Mr. Beadnell, and Dickens himself figures in the mournful character of Clenman:

"No childhood, no youth, except one remembrance; that one remembrance proved only that day to be a piece of folly . . . while all that was hard and stern in his recollection remained reality on being proved. The one tender recollection of his experience would not bear the same test and melted away."

Let us return to the youthful Dickens, the clever and charming Dickens, earning his five guineas a week by shorthand reporting.

He was in love, he was sensitive, he was striving to do well what he was doing, but he was also ambitious. He dressed in a fastidious, almost dandified fashion, and he had very handsome blue eyes. He delighted in animation and movement. But he was able, at the same time, to concentrate his thoughts and consider the means by which he might attain his goal: namely, literary fame.

There is good reason for saying that the most distinguished English writers of today have been able, like Rudyard Kipling, to create only a few types, or like Conan Doyle, only one. What, for instance, is a Watson alongside of a Sherlock Holmes? Dickens, on the contrary, had the marvellous talent of breathing the breath of life into all his characters, of giving them all, even the vaguest of them, a salient individuality which we remember and which imprints itself, indelibly, at the first stroke.

Let us take, for example, *David Copperfield.* David is the centre of the story, everything leads back to him, and nevertheless Aunt Betsy is inimitably eccentric, Dick is a refreshing fool, Uriah Heep a scamp of the first order, Steerforth a man sure of himself. Each character has his own special intensity. The carrier Barkis, the fisherman Peggotty, and old Mrs. Gummige, sitting in her chair and mourning for her "old 'un," remain enduring types. A few gestures and a few words suffice.

Accordingly, we need not be surprised to see Dickens make his début in literature with essays, portraits, suggestive episodes, and sketches. He remained, throughout his life, even in his most vigorous and crowded volumes, an amazing master of the silhouette and the episodic detail.

Almost from boyhood he practised his powers in these rapid, yet vigorous pen pictures of men and things. He strove to catch the very soul of his people, as he did the soul of his landscapes, in some significant aspect. It was in such fashion, for example, that he drew a living portrait of his father's barber, who had a mania for criticising the military strategy of Napoleon: Under the same circumstances, and in Napoleon's place, he would have done this, and he would have done that, and he would have conquered, *parbleu!*

As a matter of fact, there are in Dickens a whole collection of maniacs—and one may even end by wearying of the monotony of their gestures and their words. But it all remains pro-

foundly human. Have we not, every one of us, our own manias? Our own manias may be unimportant, or agreeable, or odious. But they play a part, even in our slightest actions, and yet we scarcely ever become aware of them.

One evening, in 1833, while the bells were ringing out from a neighbouring church tower, a man glided furtively through the shadows of Fleet Street, London. Suddenly he stopped, and stood trembling before a letter box. Then he glanced around him with profound anxiety. He hesitated a few moments. What was about to happen? What crime was about to be committed? The man remained silent and undecided. He held in his feverish hand some object—which he ended by depositing in the box, after which he fled away like a thief.

In order to reassure the reader, let us at once give the key to this melodramatic enigma. We have just related Dickens's first entry into the literature of England and of the world at large.

Timid, excessively impressionable, and at the same time full of energy, and animated by an

ardent and implacable will (all of which may easily be combined in one and the same temperament), the young man had furtively deposited in the letter box of the *Old Monthly Magazine,* not the first of his *Sketches,* but the one which he thought would be of the most direct interest to the public. He had attempted to gather together a number of ironic and judicial observations in a loosely episodic form, under the title of *A Dinner in Poplar Walk.*

It should be noted that Dickens began his series of popular works, popular in every sense of the term, and more particularly in the best sense, by picturing people and scenes of humble life, the poor and needy lower classes. He found among them, and he continued to find, ceaselessly, to the very end, all the essential and unforeseen elements of farcical or sentimental comedies, and of picturesque dramas.

What elation the young writer must have felt when he saw his prose printed for the first time in a magazine of good standing, and fol-

lowed by his mysterious pseudonym, Boz, which was not slow in creating a sensation!

The lively vein of caricature in Boz attracted immediate attention, because it was combined with an audacity of observation and a spirit of minute detail, even in the most trivial sketch. Does this mean that Dickens revealed himself at once, with a single leap, to the full extent of his mature powers? No, not by any means.

He was related at the start to that line of humorous story-tellers, lovers of buffoonery and practical jokes, who swiftly catch the reader's interest by presenting to him, wrapped up in some diverting episode, preferably somewhat burlesque and trivial, some corner of real life, ugly or attractive as the case might be, but caught in full swing and movement.

Accordingly, it was with real tears of joy and an indescribable emotion that young Charles Dickens took his first steps along the brilliant avenue of fame.

Naturally the *Old Monthly Magazine,* which had unhesitatingly opened its columns to him

and continued to accept *Sketches by Boz,* was careful not to shower him with gold, or even silver, or any other form of currency. Boz was lively, Boz was amusing, Boz was witty, with a little vein of somewhat vague sentimentality. He found favour. It is easy to conceive that the excellent shorthand reporter of the *Morning Chronicle* took a very special interest in the impatient, elated, feverish author of the *Sketches.* Besides, when Charles Dickens sought for serious employment and adequate pay on an important paper, it was for the express purpose of placing himself in a position to show what he was capable of doing and what he wanted to do. His established connection was singularly favourable to his growing literary ambitions. Accordingly, Dickens aided his best friend, Boz, to publish his subsequent essays in the *Evening Chronicle,* which was an afternoon edition of his own paper.

Boz puzzled the public, amused his colleagues, interested writers who appreciated an alert and attractive form, and delighted lovers

of wholesome jollity—and they are very numerous in London, as they are throughout England.

Boz did not seek for the impossible. He was readily contented with rather commonplace plots, provided they were humorous. Here is a typical case: Horatio Sparkins, clerk in a draper's shop, is full of practical jokes. He passes himself off as an authentic lord to a worthy, middle-class family with an immoderate fondness for pompous and sonorous titles. But in the end the real social position of the trickster is discovered.

It is worth while to remember that Dickens began to write while Louis-Philippe was on the throne of France. Dickens also, like Henri Monnier, was destined to picture many a ludicrous bourgeois type, innumerable varieties of British Joseph Prudhommes. It was all very well, so long as they were content to be merely stupid, but some of them were capable also of being malevolent. Through the sketch and the anecdote, Dickens was advancing along the

path of impassioned and virulent satire of manners. What matters a touch of vulgarity, if one must follow the author to the end, and if the truth of detail demands it?

The real Molière, the philosophic creator of *Le Misanthrope* and *Le Tartufe,* may have betrayed himself much earlier, in certain fragments of some farce, or some episodic comedy of intrigue. In like manner, Dickens was destined to emerge from Boz.

Meanwhile Boz was very widely read. An influential journalist, Hogarth by name, who held the position of managing editor of the *Evening Chronicle,* widely proclaimed the merits of Dickens's brilliant literary début.

Boz received a salary of seven guineas a week; consequently he earned more than his excellent friend, the stenographer, but he gave him all of it, because he owed it all to him.

Let us make a brief calculation: 7 guineas, that is to say, 147 shillings per week, or approximately $157 per month, takes us, together with this charming and distinguished

young man, rather far from the sickly and unhappy lad in the gloomy blacking warehouse, sadly but rapidly capping the pots and pasting on the labels, at a salary of six shillings a week —not quite seven dollars a month!

Yet the time was coming when Charles Dickens would be offered five thousand dollars for a Christmas tale only a few pages in length.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH WE MEET THE FANTASTIC PERSONAGE OF MR. PICKWICK—THE ROMANCE OF A NOVELIST—VICTORY AND MOURNING—SOME LITERARY PIRATES

COME right in, ladies and gentlemen. Here you will find enjoyment and hope and consolation. For you are about to be initiated into the singular, strange, bizarre, extraordinary, abnormal, prodigious, naïve, formidable and truculent adventures of Mr. Pickwick. The honourable Mr. Pickwick, whom I have the pleasure of presenting to you, is not only a clown and a marionette. He is not only a man and a simpleton. He is a sort of hero and demi-god. You think perhaps that the good-natured, fat old fellow is a man of experience, that the old stupid is a rogue and a knave, that he may be grotesque, but that he is clever enough to see through Mrs. Bardell's hysterics and the

tricks of that rascally Jingle, that he may fall into traps and make acquaintance with the damp straw of jails, that he will be kindly, stupid, happy and sublime, that he will be beaten and belaboured and yet content; in short, that he will be Sancho Panza and Don Quixote in one. You are right and you are wrong. Extremes meet. Truth and error touch elbows. The enormous spectacles of the worthy Mr. Pickwick will often see life such as it might be, rather than such as it is. But what difference does it make? His credulity is like faith; it is capable of overturning mountains. Mr. Pickwick is contented wherever he is, because he is amiable. Be amiable like him, such is the virtue that I wish for you. In reading the adventures of Mr. Pickwick, you will participate in a marvellous feast, and you will drink a nectar that will give you a simple and holy elation. Amen!

There is what Dickens might have said to his readers at the outset of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club.*

But he did not say it, and for several different reasons.

In the first place, his agreement was to write *Pickwick* in the form of successive monthly installments, and he did not yet know who were the friends and enemies of his great adventurer, nor what would be the exact amount of punch that he was to absorb, nor to what startling acrobatic heights he would carry the life of this sportive superman.

He himself was still unaware of all that Mr. Pickwick concealed within his portly personage; he did not even suspect that his hero was on the point of conquering all England as easily as Mr. Winkle could crack his whip or Mr. Tupman give utterance to his innumerable inanities.

The truth is that he was eager to pour himself out, measurelessly, to the full extent of his vast capacity for joyousness and movement, for free and intense life. The stage setting was of small importance. He never troubled himself about it; perhaps he never troubled him-

self enough; to him the essential thing was to create the marvellous, the true, the ever enjoyable.

But how did he himself come to be launched upon these *Adventures,* which might have proved as disastrous to him as to his portly hero, Pickwick? (Assuming that he had originally intended him to be portly, a point that has not been proven.) This deserves to be explained.

A famous caricaturist, Seymour, suggested to his publishers, Chapman and Hall, that he should do a volume of sketches for them of scenes of sporting life, a type in which he excelled. Being wide-awake to their own interests, these publishers invited the coöperation of Boz, whose lively and fantastic imagination they felt sure would ably supplement that of the artist; in short, they proposed that Dickens should furnish monthly installments of text at the rate of fourteen pounds apiece.

The idea at the start was to relate with great frankness and originality the deeds and exploits

of the principal members of a sort of Nimrod Club composed of awkward and unskilled sportsmen.

Dickens accepted the offer, for he found the remuneration tempting, and, besides, he was looking for an opportunity to show the strength and ingenuity of his inventive powers. Seventy dollars a month is not by any means to be despised by a young writer of twenty-four, who is without private means, yet has no intention of continuing to waste his intellectual resources in the quality of newspaper reporter, and who, furthermore, is soon to acquire additional responsibilities.

But Dickens had no special fondness for comic sporting pictures. He thought that they had already been singularly overdone, and he feared that he should not find in them an inspiration of sufficiently general interest. Accordingly, he sought for some other idea, deciding at the same time to retain at least one sportsman, whose diverting adventures he

might chronicle. This sportsman was destined to be Mr. Winkle, the man with the whip.

Accordingly he continued his search, and, with the coöperation of his publisher and illustrator, he evolved the fertile idea of a society for exploration and travel. The already popular author of *Sketches* was himself greatly delighted with the general conception of a Pickwick Club, in which his hero could intoxicate himself magnificently with his own words and acquire new energy through agreeable libations, in company with his comrades, inspired by no less generous a flame.

He had only to launch him upon the world, and Mr. Pickwick would make his own way. He would always make egregious blunders, always bungle, always misunderstand, until his very ineptitude became a sort of sovereign and victorious candor, and the public ended by discovering inside their clay idol something very like a divinity.

But Dickens did not dream of this at first. His genius awoke in the process of creation.

He began by painting a group of comic personalities, seen through the prism of a magic and unbridled fantasy, capable of banishing the thought of daily cares alike from the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant.

Little by little, he threw himself with increasing vehemence and concentrated emotion into this vast and chaotic farce; he continually crossed the border-line of buffoonery and Homeric laughter, but often also he touched the highest note of true comedy and the deepest note of true drama.

His gift for dramatic action was of enormous help to him in *Pickwick*. It is necessary to revert continually to this point and to insist upon it. On one occasion he amused himself by dashing off a parody on *Othello* for an amateur performance; and in 1836, the same year that witnessed the glorious expansion of Mr. Pickwick, he became interested in the enterprises of a certain theatrical manager, Braham, at the St. James Theatre, and composed two librettos for him: *The Strange Gentleman* and *The Vil-*

lage Coquettes. The two pieces, it should be added, were produced in September and December respectively. The composers, who were destined to an infinitely greater obscurity than their collaborator, were a Mr. Harley and a Mr. Hullah.

The appearance of Mr. Pickwick, who was destined to give a sudden and definite direction to Charles Dickens's literary career, and to permit him to acquire fame and fortune within a brief time, coincided with another important event in his existence, namely, his marriage.

On the second of April, 1836, he was married to Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of the journalist who had encouraged him in his first efforts, and at whose home he was a constant visitor.

We shall not attempt to shed the light of any hitherto unpublished details regarding the conjugal life of this celebrated author. But it is at least permissible, without attempting to lift the veil very far, to try to find some explanation of his conduct. We could not bring our-

selves to emulate the prudent silence of the majority of his biographers, whose reserve commands respect, but at the same time is a little humiliating from the critical point of view; nor to undertake a minute and profitless inquiry, in which we should run the risk of falling into error, or at least into a tangle of hazardous and perhaps blameworthy conjectures.

The facts are as follows: Dickens was married in 1836. He and his beloved Kate led a life that may be characterised as being at one and the same time social and domestic. His wife had two sisters, one of whom he venerated like a saint, to borrow Mr. Chesterton's phrase, and whose sudden death in the full flower of youth was so heavy a blow that he expressed a wish that he might be buried with her, and cherished the sad and unalterable memory of her ever after; while the other sister, after his divorce in 1858, remained his best friend to the day of his death.

It is not unprofitable to begin by noting, also on the authority of Mr. Chesterton, that young

Charles, poor, lonely, and haunted by painful memories, suddenly found himself welcomed by three young girls. It was less a woman that he loved than love itself, the exquisite and wonderful opportunity to love and to be loved. Being singularly handsome in his youth, as we may easily convince ourselves by taking a glance at Lawrence's portrait showing him at the age of twenty-three, and at the fashionable young aristocrat depicted in the sketch by the Count d'Orsay, how could he have failed to be made much of in the Hogarth household?

Mr. Chesterton thinks that the young author lost his head, and that he fell a victim, not to first love, but to a first flirtation. It is true that this critic makes no allusion to Miss Maria Beadnell, and that, intent on general ideas, he seems quite deliberately to have forgotten her. But the banker's daughter had appeared to Charles Dickens as a sort of ideal creation, a spirit of dreams and fairyland. On the other hand, he had been received, and that, too, most cordially, by the Hogarths, received as a jour-

nalist and author, and soon, very soon, far too soon perhaps, as suitor for one of the daughters.

It will never do to forget, in any discussion of Dickens, his eminently impulsive character, which constituted his entire artistic strength, but which, on the other hand, could not protect him from human weaknesses. His extreme sensitiveness was the result of a nervous condition which seemed to impel him to play the mountebank almost at the same time as the good Samaritan. He was incapable of being a halfway optimist or pessimist. He surrendered himself unreservedly to his emotions, and when deeply moved he easily lost sight of actualities. He always had far more of the lyric poet and romanticist in his nature than he had of the realist.

We have no ground to complain of this; but he himself was destined to suffer enormously from this very exaltation to which we chiefly owe the products of his genius.

Miss Catherine Hogarth, we are told, although with great dearth of detail, was small

of stature. She was an agreeable young woman, with a bright complexion. A drawing by Daniel Maclise depicts her in the full ripeness of youth, imbued with a distinctive and penetrating charm. She had pretty eyes and lovely hair, arranged loosely in curls drawn well forward, after the prevailing style of the time.

She had, it seems, a tendency towards stoutness, and the one portrait that is preserved of her taken in full maturity pictures her, as a matter of fact, as quite corpulent. She seems to have been a serious and conscientious woman, rather than a really tender one.

At the beginning, Dickens prudently stayed on in his bachelor's apartments, for he had made what is called a love match. The Hogarths had little or no fortune, as Dickens was destined to discover on more than one occasion.

The first number of *The Posthumous Journal of the Pickwick Club* appeared almost simultaneously with the announcement of his marriage. Dickens, finding himself embarrassed by the multiplying expenses of furnishing a home,

modest as it was, found himself obliged to ask his publishers for an advance. They consented only after considerable demurring. The novelist was entitled to share in the profits. But at the start the profits were highly speculative; in fact, none at all; for, unfortunately, the early issues of *Pickwick* did not sell; in fact, not over four or five hundred were sent to the binder's. It was a failure, real and complete. It might become a disaster. Accordingly, it is easy to understand that his publishers had hard work to make up their minds, in those early months of 1836, to allow him a humble increase of one pound a month. It should be added that the publication of *Pickwick* underwent a number of vicissitudes, and that fate seemed at first implacably arrayed against it.

The illustrator, Seymour, who made the drawings for the opening installment, shot himself with a revolver; after some trouble, he was replaced, first by Buss, and then by H. K. Browne, who united the efforts of his lively and

clever pencil with those of Dickens, under the pseudonym of Phiz.

But the young writer was anxious, almost disheartened. The failure of Pickwick meant the failure of his hopes, and consequently ruin. Accordingly, he revealed the fertility of his imagination by evoking straight out of limbo the inimitable Sam Weller, whom the incomparable Mr. Pickwick had the good fortune to encounter in the court-yard of the White Hart Inn, in the course of valiantly blacking his boots.

Messrs. Chapman and Hall, as well as Charles Dickens, were destined to share largely in this good fortune of the honourable Mr. Pickwick. And how could we do otherwise than rejoice with them? Sam Weller is a most engaging personality and an inexhaustible source of entertainment. Like the faithful companion of the Knight of the Doleful Countenance, he overflows with axioms, proverbs and wise sayings, and gives them forth in an unbroken stream. When Henry Monnier invented M. Prudhomme for the delectation of the citi-

zens of Paris, he overjoyed them with such poetic gems as the following: "This sabre is the most beautiful day of my life," or, again, "The chariot of the ocean is navigating above a volcano." And with what authority he declared:

"Sir, that is my opinion, and I share!"

Sam Weller has no less a degree of self-assurance and exhilarating force of character when he declaims, with unbounded satisfaction (and for that matter is not everything in *Pickwick* more or less unbounded?):

"Don't worry, it's all for my own good, as the school-boy said when he was being whipped,"

Or again:

"Wery glad to see you, indeed, and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'lm'n said to the fi' pun' note."

And all sorts of other pompous and grandiloquent rigmaroles of the same caliber, whose rather low order of wit was hailed with en-

thusiasm by all London, and all England besides.

Within a few days Sam Weller had become a personage; Pickwick, arrested and set free, drowned and rescued, and always beatific, had become the fashion and his name served to christen hats and garments, carriages and even cigars. There were Pickwick dress goods and Pickwick walking sticks. There was also a hundred-thousand-dollar profit for the publishers and fifteen thousand for the author, without counting the annual revenues, the wide-spread fame, and advantageous contracts for subsequent publications.

While *Pickwick* was in everybody's hands, and the editions were nearing the fifty-thousand mark, Dickens proceeded to install himself, his wife, his son, a two-months-old-child, and his sister-in-law, Mary, in a more comfortable dwelling in Doughty Street. At first he was wonderfully happy there. Success had rewarded his efforts. When at last he had completed his task, and it was a lengthy one, for

MRS. CHARLES DICKENS

On the 2nd of April, 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, by whom he had ten children. She was the daughter of the managing editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.

he naturally was obliged to satisfy the profitable exigencies of his publishers, he was free once more to set forth, afoot or on horse-back, either to soothe his nerves or to visit and revisit certain people and places, to explore gloomy lanes and sordid alleys and grey and dismal suburbs.

Wherever he went, he sought for material to feed his eager curiosity, and ardent sympathy that enabled him to share in the anguish and wretchedness of the whole world.

Mary Hogarth brightened his home with all the charm of her seventeen springtimes. Even to a greater degree than his wife, who was absorbed no doubt by the cares of housekeeping and maternity, Mary seemed to understand the joys and the anxieties of Dickens and to divine all the nobility and all the profundity of his dawning genius.

To the candour of a child, and the magnificence of youth in its first flower, Mary added all the power of simple understanding and pathetic charity which is often the natural and

splendid treasure of the humblest woman. The novelist beheld her in all her divine radiance: and little Nell was destined later to be endowed with all the sublimity which he had read in the pure glance of young Mary Hogarth.

And then suddenly that glance clouded, darkened and became extinct. One evening, in May, 1837, after returning from the theatre, she died, stricken down by illness in a few hours. This irreparable and purposeless event came upon the novelist as an unforeseen and atrocious shock. Never in his life would he be able to forget that gentle girl who died at the age of seventeen. In his reveries and on his travels, beneath the enchanting serenity of Italian skies and before the majesty of Niagara Falls, he called to mind her treasured memory, which was, nevertheless, so poignantly sad.

Think of the tragedy of it! Through his unwearied energies Dickens had conquered with a high hand both fame and fortune.

Everything smiled upon him. He was eager for happiness, both for himself and for those who surrounded him, especially for her who, next to his wife, and perhaps even more devotedly, shared in his splendid dreams. And then Death came, the unknown Visitor, the black Reaper.

Then Dickens halted, horrified, before the enigma. His pen, that ready instrument of joy, of elation, of compassion, fell from his nerveless hand. He forgot everything, even his ambition, in the presence of this bereavement, which revealed to his anguished heart all the other unknown bereavements that take place on this indifferent planet.

And for some time *Pickwick* ceased to appear.

But he must live, he must struggle, he must resign himself to the impossibility of solving the mysterious purposes of fate.

Towards the close of the year 1837, Mr. Pickwick, still blundering, still credulous and beatific, consented to settle down near Dul-

wich and to abandon the great highways on which he had had so many adventures. This paladin of a new type at last went into retirement, at least to all appearances. Yet he is, and will always continue to be, in the eyes of all England, the big, benevolent traveller, with low-crowned hat, huge, glistening spectacles and tight-fitting breeches, while he carries his overcoat under one arm and his valise under the other. A dinner, given by the author to his publishers and a few intimate friends, including the actor Macready and the journalist Forster, celebrated his well merited triumph.

Thanks to his success, Charles Dickens now formed some valuable connections: He was welcomed enthusiastically in some of the most fashionable drawing-rooms, notably in that of Lady Blessington, at Gore House, where, in addition to the exquisite Count d'Orsay, one of the lions of the period, he was brought into contact with Thackeray, the two Disraelis, father and son, the painter Maclise, who has left us some curious portraits of Dickens, the future

Lord Lytton, the future Napoleon III., and many others, including artists, musicians, painters and critics.

But, on the other hand, he was violently attacked by certain authors who were jealous of his success and, being themselves second-rate novelists, became just so many anonymous and prejudiced critics.

He was accused of all sorts of imaginary misdeeds, and even of insanity, and, when the attacks were not personal, they dragged his style and his heroes in the mud.

Now, Dickens was, and continued to be throughout his life, extremely sensitive. It was Horace who characterised poets as an irritable race. Yet there have been few poets as irritable as this great poet-novelist. He resented the slightest pin-prick as a mortal attack. A mere jest would cause him veritable suffering. He had a habit of infinitely exaggerating certain little events of literary life and of considering a satiric comment on one of his novels as a most abominable calumny.

It should be noted in fairness that Dickens had occasion to suffer enormously from certain needy and desperate penmen, who may well be regarded as the pirates of the world of letters, shamelessly pillaging the writings or, to use the term best suited to put their conduct in its true light, the literary merchandise of others.

Poor Boz was forced to fight savagely against the encroachments of Buz, Poz and Bos. Poor Charles Dickens, in spite of his affectionate and indulgent nature, must needs invoke the aid of all the devils and all the law courts against the Charles Diggenses (!) and other plagiarists who were plundering his name and his manner without pity and without warning. Before long, to his horror, there were side by side with *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* an *Oliver Twiss* and a *Nicholas Nickelberry!*

Another misadventure of the same nature: Seymour's widow, with her judgment weakened, no doubt, by sorrow, did not hesitate to

claim that the conception of Pickwick had originated with the illustrator. Nothing could have been more false. Pickwick owed his whole existence to Dickens, to the thousand and one happy inventions of each installment, each chapter, each page, in which he so generously lavished the unsuspected resources of one of the most prodigal geniuses that ever existed.

Dickens had so many things to say that he would have said them, no matter where, no matter when and no matter how. Like Swift and Rabelais, he never needed to trouble himself regarding the theme he was to treat.

And the strangest thing is that in giving birth to his enormous and prodigious Pickwick he did not exhaust himself in any way whatever, but quite the contrary. When that amazing publication was completed he had already commenced two other works, which, although dealing with a different order of ideas, are none the less both of them astonishing masterpieces.

From this time on he was rich, famous, proud

of his work, sought after, and haunted by the most beautiful and touching visions. He had found his true path. He was destined to remain always the same, and yet forever new, thanks to the incomparable power of his genius. Already all England recognised the truth of his portrayals and delighted in them.

At the age of twenty-six he was in the full enjoyment of victory and health and good looks. He was bent upon hearing all the lamentations of the weak and the orphaned, upon denouncing all forms of baseness, upon glorifying all salutary joys, and upon giving life to a world of his own creation.

He came with full hands to his task, and he was destined to pass the whole of his laborious, intense, feverish life in emptying them.

CHAPTER IV

TYPES AND MANNERS.—THE KINDNESS OF A CLOWN.—THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS OF LONDON AND ENGLAND.—MR. SWIVELLER'S GRANDILOQUENCE. — MR. QUILP SCREAMS WITH LAUGHTER.—LITTLE NELL PASSES AWAY

HENCEFORWARD, whether in the big house in Devonshire Terrace, which was his residence from 1840 to 1850 and which was picturesquely extended in rotundas and verandahs, where he could meditate at his ease facing the bright fountain of a shady park; or in a hired cottage at Twickenham; or at the seaside, at Broadstairs, where he chose to live in seclusion with his family and a few faithful friends, Charles Dickens devoted himself, to borrow Flaubert's phrase, to the task of placing black upon white.

We ought rather to have said blue upon

white, since that was the colour of ink which he affected. In common with his heroes, one and all (and he never spares us these details, which recur again and again, after the manner of Homeric epithets), Dickens himself had manias, fads, or, at all events and above all, settled habits.

He had to work at his own hours, according to a programme to which he had subjected himself. He could not write without having a certain number of pens within his reach, and a certain number of familiar ornaments upon his table, even such commonplace ornaments as the bronze frogs which he always insisted upon taking with him, along with other objects, upon his travels.

Nevertheless, in spite of the enormous amount of his daily task, he was constantly thirsting for adventures: he delighted in the extraordinary and the unforeseen, in strange occurrences and mad escapades. It would seem as though he were striving to live his own life after the manner of life in his novels.

"We see him, on a certain occasion, in the country, retiring to his bed-chamber in order to take a well earned rest after a particularly active day. But, finding that he cannot sleep, he desires to go out and return to London on foot, a little stroll of about thirty miles.

"There he is, setting forth into the night, full of energy. In the grey of early dawn he arrives in sight of the suburbs of London, enters a coffee-house, the host of which has just opened his doors, and asks for something to drink. He offers a coin in payment, the only one he has with him.

" 'Your coin is a counterfeit, and I shall have you arrested,' says the host.

"The coin, in truth, has a very doubtful appearance. The pedestrian apologises and, in order to rescue himself from his dilemma, has recourse to a method which several times before has succeeded.

" 'I am Charles Dickens.'

"The host, of course, knows the famous novelist by name. He has undoubtedly read sev-

eral of his works. But his early morning guest presents, to tell the truth, a most unprepossessing appearance. His shoes are bespattered with mud, and his garments covered with dust. The statement does not sound convincing.

"'Oh, yes! Anybody can say "I am Charles Dickens"!'

"But a neighbouring druggist is about to open his shop; Dickens proposes that they shall take him as arbitrator, not of the coin that has been called in question, but of his own identity. Accordingly, they betake themselves to the druggist; there, the grumbling coffee-house keeper explains that he has been robbed within the week; and there, the druggist recognises the novelist, whose portrait is familiar to every one who knows how to read and cares to know the features of their favourite author. Mine host of the coffee-house is delighted, not so much for having been patronised by a celebrated man of letters, as to find that his customer is not a thief."

This pretty anecdote, so amusingly related

by Monsieur Hervier, has the merit of initiating us into one of Dickens's favourite pastimes.

He loved to wander alone, at all hours of the day and night, gazing and listening. This habit, which he acquired in those early hours of liberty, when evening set him free from the horrible blacking warehouse, was a habit which he retained throughout life.

He sought the haunts of the humble, the lowly, the swarming populace. This same man, whose lively and fantastic spirit formed the delight of a chosen circle, became in his capacity as author, to repeat what has often been said before, sincerely and fundamentally *of and for the people.*

Unquestionably he felt a poetic and lyric emotion in the presence of the spectacle of nature; but he never succeeded in separating it from the tumultuous, grotesque, and complex drama of humanity in action; for he himself was, above all else, human and social.

His stage setting, his environment, especial-

ly that of London and its suburbs, where he moved at ease and of which he knew every nook and corner, exists essentially through its relationship to the personages of the drama which Dickens had heard with his inner ear, and of which he reproduced the voice, the accent, the slightest gesture, in harmony with the locality described, and with an amazing lavishness of salient detail.

It is easy to understand why Dickens became the idol of these people whom he knew so well, and to whom, perhaps, he alone has succeeded in speaking with magisterial authority. He is a weaver of romance, and he is a moralist, but he never succeeded in separating the one from the other. Hence come his power and his prestige over the masses. He did not preach virtue in a didactic and pedagogic manner, but he denounced evil with such bitter and ferocious irony that he inspired a hatred of it. And while he excelled in surrounding himself with an atmosphere of darkness and mysterious horrors, while he showed a strange

ability in conducting us to resorts frequented by individuals of hang-dog and gallows-bird demeanour, at the same time no one has rivalled him in his power of depicting rogues and rascals, and laying bare social iniquities with a good humour that is at once a diversion and a revenge.

These are the impressions which we receive, and always with the same original intensity, whenever, for example, we re-read *Oliver Twist*.

Oliver Twist, which succeeded *Pickwick*, was published in *Bentley's Magazine*, of which Dickens was for the time being editor, and easily acquired thousands of subscribers from among those sensitive to the undeserved sufferings of abandoned children. Oliver was a parish charge, an asylum orphan, a poor little scape-goat, tortured by hunger, subjected to blows, hatred and contempt, and to what the author sardonically calls the tender mercy of church wardens and inspectors.

What a host of abandoned and unhappy children have appeared in serials since the days of

poor Oliver Twist! Dickens's subject was one which was the common property of the world at large, and he chose to complicate it with a quite commonplace story of cut-throats and thieves. There is no question about that. But Dickens was something more than a story-teller; he was a man who had eyes and knew how to use them. From the moment that we open the volume we come under his charm; we laugh and weep and rage, just as he wills us to. We shall never be able to forget the dying mother, the charity doctor, the nurse who keeps up her courage on a double ration of beer, or the poor children, marked and ticketed, in that lamentable depository of indigence.

Whether he is brief, as he is here, or prolix, losing himself in a confused tangle of incidents and details of manners and of characters, we are with him, heart and soul. He is a great magician who has cast his spell upon us. We must needs listen to his tirades, accept him on the strength of his bare word, rebel or sympathise in unison with him.

How we quiver with sympathy for Oliver Twist, pale, puny, sickly little lad, who has furthermore the misfortune to fall ill of cold and hunger. The idea of such a thing! Why, it is preposterous in the case of a boy who has the good luck to be under the double control of the parish and the alms-house, the good luck to receive a volley of blows from Mrs. Mann, the protection of a beadle such as Mr. Bumble, the eternal Mr. Bumble, and to sleep among coffins at ten years of age!

And we continue to quiver with sympathy throughout four or five hundred pages. No one has ever painted unhappy childhood and youth, humiliated, sensitive, and in revolt, so well as Dickens did, excepting, here and there, Daudet, and excepting, each in his own way, Jules Vallès and Léon Frapié.

Oliver Twist is an exquisite picture of suffering childhood, the small ancestor of countless other small beings, abused, deserted, desolate, and, heaven be thanked, quickly consoled. For there are always some rays of light in the

darkest of jails, save only that in which the hideous Fagin is confined.

The general public loves to be assured as to the fate of characters in fiction; the villain, the traitor, the thief ought to receive a just punishment. This is by no means displeasing to Dickens himself; and he has so many admirable qualities that he may well claim the right not to be so fastidious as to refuse to make concessions to popular taste.

Undoubtedly, the conclusion of *Oliver Twist* and the contrast between Mr. Brownlow and characters of the type of those hideous ruffians, Fagin, Sikes and even Monks, offers us, today especially, nothing particularly new, in point of view of plot. But who could express so well as Charles Dickens the naïve compassion of little Dick for little Oliver, or the simple goodness of Rose Maylie?

Emphasis has rightly been laid upon the melodramatic gloom which especially enshrouds all the heroes and all the scenes of this novel, which, although it made a sensation, never en-

joyed the same sort of theatrical triumph, never became a capital event in English life, as *Pickwick* did before it.

This is because, after having invented a sort of mad poetry of hilarity, he desired to create a poetry of terror. Hence we have this collection of drab and grey and pitch-black scenes, at once naïve and horrible, which the illustrator Cruikshank visualised with grim energy.

We have the feeling of being taken into a sort of inferno, the realm of demons. For Charles Dickens, as we know, possessed and always retained the special gift of bringing forth, as from an enchanted box, all sorts of diabolical shadow shapes, excepting at such times as he chose to reform us by leading us among some little group of terrestrial angels—for there always are a few such still remaining—happy in the enjoyment of their earthly paradise. Thank God! Oliver is not always seen in the midst of scoundrels and of such extremely honorable gentlemen that they might easily be mistaken for blackguards; he also passes happy

days in the company of Rose and Mrs. Maylie. He learns the joy of happy tears, after having known shame, want and degradation.

Dickens is as much at home in respectable surroundings as in the dens of thieves and the foul taverns where they hatch their villainies. But it is evident that in *Oliver Twist* he exaggerated the sombre tones in order to give his pictures a greater vigour and to make a deeper impression upon his public.

Trick-work? To be sure. But he got his effects. And in any case we must never for an instant question his preference for clean, healthful living, honest jollity, and a religion fertile in good actions and finding its concrete expression in beautiful churches, noble hymns, and peaceful cemeteries.

The year 1838, the date of the birth of that dramatic and emotional volume, *Oliver Twist*, was also that of the *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, the manuscript of which was sold some little time ago in America for five thousand dollars, with all the unpublished text that it con-

tained. This was also the year in which Dickens, decidedly indefatigable, edited the curious memoirs of a celebrated clown, Joseph Grimaldi. They excited a mild polemic in the public press, and the novelist, in accordance with his habit, felt himself called upon to let loose his thunder-bolts against his ill-intentioned critics.

It is probable that these *Memoirs* owe some part, even if not a large one, to their editor, who was so well qualified to bring out the hidden tragedy in the lives of clowns and mountebanks.

M. Jules Claretie, who has so justly defined Dickens as the novelist of respectability, has laid special stress upon one of the most striking anecdotes in the *Memoirs:*

Grimaldi, then, was a clown, more than that, a famous clown, the very king of clownery, an eminently popular person in the land appreciative of humour. Wherever he passed he received an ovation. Even Byron, it seems, descended from the ethereal regions of romanticism

in order to linger and converse with him.

Now, on a certain occasion, the following little adventure befell him: one night, after a performance, he was driving back to his home in the suburbs of London. Suddenly three thieves flung themselves upon his horse. Grimaldi, covered by their pistols, remained impassive. They searched him and secured his pocketbook and watch.

"Listen," said Grimaldi, in a cool tone; "keep my money, but at least let me have back my watch. It has no value aside from association. I would be very grateful to you."

"All right," said one of the bold highwaymen, snatching the watch from his companion and returning it with a brusque gesture to the clown; the latter had just time to catch a glimpse of the hand of this robber who still retained some sentiment; it was a mutilated hand, with only two fingers projecting from the stump. It was the hand of a certain machinist, Hamilton by name, who had been hurt in an accident to his machine. Unluckily for him,

he was in the habit of frequenting a certain tavern which Grimaldi occasionally patronised.

Grimaldi reported the robbery without giving details. Two days later he was summoned to Bow Street. There he found that Hamilton was held, together with two other individuals, strongly suspected of the attack, and surrounded with a guard of policemen.

"Do you recognise any of these men?" Grimaldi was asked.

With vast assurance Hamilton interposed:

"Of course the gentleman knows me. We take our meals side by side, and I am proud to have the honour of his acquaintance."

Grimaldi let him finish speaking, and then slowly and deliberately looked him in the face, while at the same time he raised his right hand with only two fingers extended.

Hamilton thought himself lost.

Grimaldi hesitated for a moment. The guilty man bowed his head with a hopeless air. How young he was! How utterly overwhelmed he

seemed! Was he beyond reform, an absolutely corrupted character?

At last the clown declared:

"I do not recognise any of the accused."

This meant their salvation.

The following day Hamilton came to thank Grimaldi effusively and with sincerity. They never met again, but for a dozen years, whenever the clown received a benefit performance, some unknown person, some anonymous spectator always ordered ten tickets. One day the clown's servant noticed that the right hand of this eccentric unknown was mutilated. Hamilton had again become an honest man. He died in a conflagration while trying to save the lives of two children who had been abandoned to the flames.

Simultaneously with his celebrated *Oliver Twist,* Charles Dickens had begun his no less celebrated *Nicholas Nickleby,* the installments of which, when they appeared in 1839, were received with an almost frensied eagerness.

This book continues to astonish and capti-

vate us long afterwards, if not by its construction, at least by the sharp relief of certain physiognomies, which may be regarded as composite portraits. There are a host of women from all lands and all periods to be found in the person of Mrs. Nickleby relating her past life with so much enjoyment and insistence! We forget Nicholas and Madeline Bray, in order to hear her consoling herself for human vicissitudes by minutely describing to us her former servants, her former style of living; and she pours forth her amusing inanities with such good faith that in the end she unconsciously enunciates certain great psychological truths precisely as M. Jourdain spoke prose without knowing it.

It must be conceded that Dickens possessed the immense, the infinite gift of laughter and of tears. It must also be conceded that in writing the successive installments of his stories he found a way of shouting abroad, through and above the action of the plot, his personal enthusiasms and hatreds. But the wicked char-

acters in these stories remain consistently wicked and must receive the punishment that they deserve—and in this respect the great English novelist is exempt from the vulgar optimism that has been attributed to him. Accordingly, Squeers receives his deserts. And, as to such profligate aristocrats as Sir Mulberry Hawk, they also get their due share of mauling and lambasting.

Without stopping to ask whether some of the portraits of this order are not the outcome of too prejudiced a party spirit and treated with too systematic a hostility, it must be recognised that Charles Dickens had a very sincere and very real confidence in democracy, in its generous instincts, its beneficent influence, and its promise for the future.

The whole problem was to liberate this democracy from its deadly trammels, to educate it, and enlighten it as to its duties and its rights.

From the outset of his career Dickens took this rôle of educator very seriously. He said to

himself: One nail drives out another. The novel is an instrument capable of destroying the powers of corruption and crime, or overturning the already rotten edifice of all social iniquities.

He could not endure an injustice, no matter how slight. Indignation was his chief spur, excepting when pity wrung from his heart a loud outcry of suffering and revolt.

But comedy remains his favourite weapon. He is prodigiously eloquent, because he has the gift of being prodigiously amusing. In this sense Mantalini belongs in that colossal gallery of personages each perfect of their kind, who because of their supreme and sustained comedy have their legitimate place among Nickleby, Gradgrind and Scrooge on the one side, and Toby Veck, Stephen and Bob Cratchit on the other.

Mantalini is as eminently remarkable as Micawber, the elder Weller or the imposing Pickwick. He, too, has an inexhaustible fertility of phrases that refuse to be forgotten: as, for

instance, when speaking of his wife: "She will be a lovely widow; I shall be a body. Some handsome women will cry; she will laugh demnably."

Every now and then in Dickens, at the turn of a page or chapter, we come across epitaphs of irresistible import. He gives us the comedy of death as well as of life, but with scarcely a touch of sinister or supernatural horror.

Meanwhile, although he loved with his whole heart the chief diversions of the common people, Dickens also loved luxuries and elegance. He earned a great deal and he spent a great deal. We must not forget that he had a large family: six children, to whom he was devoted and whose future caused him much anxiety.

That is why, with his feverish activity, he was not satisfied even when he was carrying forward a double or triple task such as would have exhausted the powers of a good many of his fellow writers. The fact that success had smiled upon him so quickly led him to believe that nothing was impossible for him.

After the example of Addison he conceived the idea of editing a weekly journal, and quickly came to terms with his publishers, Chapman & Hall. The enterprise ought to bring him between a thousand and twelve hundred dollars a month; it seemed well worth trying.

Accordingly he began the publication of his periodical under the title of *Master Humphrey's Clock*. What did he intend to make of it? A sort of cycle of tales, short stories, romances, all bound loosely together, somewhat after the manner of a London *Heptameron*, and all permeated with imagination and observation. *The Seven Poor Travellers* and *Mrs. Lorriper's Lodgers* were stories of the sort that lend themselves to be combined, multiplied and prolonged indefinitely, to the greater joy of reader and author alike.

For the author enjoyed himself quite as much as the reader, and perhaps even more so. To begin an extremely complicated story, in which there were a great variety of characters, all

very much alive, very lugubrious, or very amusing, to stop short in the midst of this first story in order to narrate a second one equally crowded and equally picturesque, and then to revert to the first in order to bring it to its destined end, was to Dickens in the nature of a game. It is a game which often wearies us, even in the noblest of his books, the most magnificently generous of them. But it was a traditional method. Chaucer, like the still older writers before him, followed the same procedure.

Dickens delighted in vast and difficult enterprises, which seemed to demand a boundless activity. He was extremely methodical and scrupulously careful in all his work. But after long sessions, during which his pen had uninterruptedly shrilled and grated across the paper, change of scene became imperative.

He had already considered the project of a flying visit to America, for his popularity was spreading rapidly in every land where the English language was spoken—almost too rapidly

to suit him, for his works were pillaged with almost greater cunning and speed than were required to write them.

Nevertheless—and this is a point which has too often been forgotten, and which it is important to keep carefully in mind while studying Charles Dickens—he was obliged to submit constantly, with a tact and a cheerfulness difficult to maintain, to the exigencies of the public, in order to keep the sale of his installments from falling off. The miracle was that, under such thoroughly commercial conditions, he was able to remain not only the most ingenious and fertile producer of popular serials, but also one of the most powerful and exceptional of modern writers.

A falling off in sales was the real reason for his presently sending his Martin Chuzzlewit to America. It was for the same motive that *Master Humphrey's Clock* stopped running, in spite of the resurrection of two old friends, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, and that we have in exchange that inimitable *Old Curiosity Shop,*

forever open to our inspection, forever stirring our emotions, and giving us the lovable and pathetic little Nell, the formidable and Shakespearean Quilp, and the majestic and unsurpassable absurdity of Dick Swiveller.

"Dickens," as Taine has admirably said, "never loses the impassioned tone; he never falls back into a natural style and simple narrative; he does nothing but mock or weep; he writes nothing but satires and elegies." The two styles blend, continually, in all his books, and the effect is inimitable.

After listening to the tirades of that incomparable babbler, Dick Swiveller, after beholding the gestures and antics of that frightful caricature, the dwarf Quilp, we must witness the death of little Nell. What a multitude of honest hearts wept over her death and shared the old grandfather's bereavement! Why did Dickens need to kill her, dear, maternal little soul, worthy sister of Florence Dombey and Little Dorrit? Some critics have reproached Dickens for the precocious maturity of little

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WORKS OF DICKENS

Above: Pickwick Papers, "The Valentine."—*Below: Nicholas Nickleby,* "The internal economy of Dotheboys Hall."

Nell, although there is nothing unnatural about it, as is shown by the fact that a host of readers among the common people felt her to be so real a person that they rose in indignation against the novelist for letting her die. Had he the right to mow down so exquisite a flower, even at the six hundredth page? Yet it was precisely to her fragility that she owed her charm. It is to her that we owe a recital that is choked with sobs, brimming over with an emotion that rivals the solemnity of a funeral oration. Dickens himself was as deeply moved as tender-hearted little Kit, or the aged grandfather, perhaps even more so.

To be convinced of this, we need only to read again the concluding pages of her history:

"For she was dead. There, upon her little bed, she lay at rest. The solemn stillness was no marvel now.

"She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the

hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.

"Her couch was dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour. 'When I die, put near me something that has loved the light and had the sky above it always.' Those were her words.

"She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor, slight thing, the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage, and the strong heart of its child mistress was mute and motionless forever.

"Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

"And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes. The old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed like a dream through haunts of misery and

care; at the door of the poor schoolmaster on the summer evening, before the furnace fire upon the cold, wet night, at the still bedside of the dying boy, there had been the same mild, lovely look. So shall we know the angels in their majesty after death.

"The old man held one languid arm in his, and had the small hand tight folded to his breast for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched to him with her last smile—the hand that had led him on through all their wanderings. Ever and anon he pressed it to his lips: then hugged it to his breast again, murmuring that it was warmer now; and as he said it he looked in agony to those who stood around, as if imploring them to help her.

"She was dead, and past all help, or need of it. The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life, even while her own was waning fast —the garden she had tended—the eyes she had gladdened—the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtful hour—the paths she had trodden as

it were but yesterday—could know her no more."

And we must not forget that it is the same author who depicts so vividly the suit brought by that rascally attorney, Sampson Brass, and shows us the horrible and clamorous joy of Quilp when he witnesses the arrest of the innocent Kit, luckless victim of a contemptible plot:

"'What!' cried the dwarf, leaning half of his body out of window. 'Kit a thief! Kit a thief! Ha, ha, ha! Why, he's an uglier-looking thief than can be seen anywhere for a penny. Eh, Kit—eh? Ha, ha, ha! Have you taken Kit into custody before he had time and opportunity to beat me! Eh, Kit—eh?' And with that he burst into a yell of laughter, manifestly to the great terror of the coachman, and pointed to a dyer's pole hard by, where a dangling suit of clothes bore some resemblance to a man upon a gibbet."

And it is still this same writer who puts upon the lips of his inimitable Dick Swiveller, who is chaffing the first-floor lodger because he has

lain in bed all day, these winged and immortal words:

"'The short and the long of it is that we cannot allow single gentlemen to come into this establishment and sleep like double gentlemen without paying extra for it. . . . An equal quantity of slumber was never got out of one bed and bedstead, and, if you're going to sleep in that way, you must pay for a double-bedded room.'"

Was not an author who at the age of twenty-nine was capable of varying his tone and manner to such an extent evidently destined to take his place in the foremost ranks?

The worthy folk who admire fidelity and affection (and, after all, there are a great many more of them than is usually believed) could not fail to glorify this great and simple painter of kindliness, who at the same time possessed the gift of nailing to the pillory of the most mordant satire all the scoundrelly knaves, unworthy masters, dishonest agents, cowardly and sinister oppressors—all of whom nevertheless,

have their comic aspect. One critic has observed, with a good deal of profundity, that Mrs. Quilp could never have been for an instant bored in the company of such a husband!

Thus the *Old Curiosity Shop* confirmed the many-sided yet indivisible glory of Dickens, magical exhibitor of human marionettes, robust psychologist, tender-hearted and Christian philosopher, at the same time that he was a stinging satirist of social evils and a unique, compelling, hallucinating visualiser of the streets of London, and of the swarms of grimacing butchers and cringing victims who come and go, day and night, along its sidewalks, lost, in time and space, in the immensity of that human quagmire.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORY OF A RAVEN—THE SMALL ADVENTURES OF A GREAT ENGLISHMAN IN GREAT AMERICA—OLD ENGLAND IN ITALY AND ON THE LAKE OF GENEVA—DOMBEY IS A BALZACIAN TYPE—ON THE STAGE AND THE LECTURE PLATFORM

DICKENS, when in the country, loved to surround himself with animals, and more particularly with dogs. And yet there are hardly any dogs to be cited from his works, as they can be from the works of Sir Walter Scott, with the solitary exception of Bill Sykes's Bull's-eye, which plays such an important rôle in his flight from justice.

The raven, Grip, on the contrary, is an eminently sympathetic personage and very much alive, in *Barnaby Rudge*, the first pages of which appeared in January, 1841, only one week after the close of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

An episodic personage, undoubtedly, but one which shows how well Dickens understood the art of introducing into the midst of the most dramatic action that timely element of humour which satisfies so admirably the requirements of his race. Barnaby Rudge, a visionary young man, has terrible antecedents. His father, formerly the steward of Mr. Haredale, a well-to-do property owner in the suburbs of London, killed his employer, as well as the latter's gardener, whom he dressed in his own clothes. The ruse succeeded, and everybody believed that it was Rudge, the steward, who had been killed. Many years pass by, but at last the victim's brother unmasks the real culprit, who is seized and thrown into prison.

The riots of 1780 broke out just in time to set the prisoner at liberty. There was a popular uprising and a mad rush of crowding, jostling Protestants across London, shouting "Down with Popery!" There followed mob violence and the shock of brutal and unchained passions. Gentle Barnaby Rudge was drawn

into the popular tidal wave which the ringleaders were directing in order to satisfy their own personal interests. One of them, for instance, Sir John Chester, having banished his own son because the latter had fallen in love with Mr. Haredale's niece, took advantage of the riots under the cloak of politics to cause the Haredale residence to be burned; but in spite of this conflagration the young man and the young girl put the crowning touch to their idyll by marriage. Meanwhile the party of order triumphs over the disorderly element, and a terrible retribution ensues; and while Rudge, the assassin, is executed together with other guilty parties, among them the hangman of London, gentle Barnaby Rudge, the son, escapes death and obtains pardon only after great difficulty.

Well, what part does the raven, Grip, play in this story? He introduces that picturesque note, strange, amusing, and unexpected, which gives the tone of originality to all of Dickens's novels.

This raven, Grip, by the way, has a history of his own. We could not forgive ourselves if we did not make passing mention of him, with some justifiable emotion, and with all the more reason because he is in any case a far less lugubrious personality than that other famous raven of Edgar Allan Poe.

Grip lived not quite so brief a life as the roses live, but none the less he failed to attain a very advanced age. But he had the good fortune to be distinguished by Charles Dickens, who fed and petted him and paid him the highest honour by introducing him into a novel that is more or less historic.

In order to repay his master, Grip was in the habit of proclaiming:

"I am a devil! I am a devil!"

When fate brutally put an end to his days, probably in consequence of an attack of indigestion, Grip was stuffed and remained the property of Dickens.

Now, how much do you think that he brought at auction, within two months after

the death of the author of *Barnaby Rudge?* The equivalent of six hundred dollars. The purchaser was probably some wealthy amateur, given to idolatry and fetichism? Not at all. It was acquired by a buyer for a museum of natural history.

But in this stirring narration of a civil war —that of the year 1780—with all its horrors and calamities, Grip must not make us forget the picturesque figure of Barnaby Rudge himself, nor Simon Tappertit and that unrolling panorama of a revolution, seething and rumbling, and finally breaking forth with fire and sword in the midst of barricades. Nevertheless, in this volume, just as later in the *Tale of Two Cities,* Dickens failed to rival the real masters of the historic novel.

In both of these novels, to be sure, our author laid his plot in an environment which he had set his heart upon reconstructing; and he brought to his task a wealth of documentary precision which, so far as it goes, makes *Barnaby Rudge* and the *Tale of Two Cities* his-

toric romances; but in the strict sense of the word they contain no pages of history, and for that matter Dickens the novelist had no intention of doing more than produce a piece of fiction. Just as in the first of these volumes he conjured up a bygone uprising in England, in the second his task was still more venturesome for him, a foreigner, for it was the French Revolution in the midst of Paris that he attempted to reincarnate. The tone of the narrative is sober and intense, and the dramatic action is well developed. A nobleman, Charles de Saint-Evremond, imbued with the philosophic ideas then in fashion, wished to make his actions accord with his ideas. Consequently he abandoned all he possessed, title of nobility, seigneurial rights, even his very name, and removed to London. But the Revolution broke out and became the Reign of Terror; and Charles, learning that one of his friends was in danger, hastened to France. It was then that he was arrested as an *émigré*, dragged before the Revolutionary tribunal and condemned;

and he escaped death only through the generous intervention of an Englishman who bore a close physical resemblance to him and who took his place in one of the consignments of victims for the guillotine.

From these rapid analyses of *Barnaby Rudge* and the *Tale of Two Cities* we can form an idea of the new direction, both in subject and in tone, which Dickens's genius was now taking. He was trying to bring to life not merely the characters of his own creation, but the entire epoch in which they moved and had their being.

Undoubtedly it was his desire to secure constant novelty by introducing into his long novels a more or less important element of mystery and romantic intrigue, and to make his pages swarm with the greatest possible number of those significant types which he had encountered in real life.

Nevertheless, he remained always and everywhere a story teller. He was constitutionally unfitted to write a history of England, even a

child's history of England. He could not help talking of himself, his own sensations, his exalted sentiments, his vigilant and sardonic observations, for everything which touched the life of the city interested him who was city-bred to his heart's core.

In spite of his descriptive talent, which permitted him to reproduce in detail whatever he saw, he constantly harped upon his personal likes and hatreds, and, in a stage setting prepared in accordance with the most scrupulous realism, gave way to lyric exaltation and to what we may call his political and social hysterics!

We are so accustomed, in these latter days, to similar diatribes contained in works of the greatest outward variety that ordinarily we hardly see Dickens at all in his revolutionary aspect. We think of him, in general, as an emotional, humorous and pathetic painter of environments and characters. We readily forget his outbursts when we come in contact with his heroes, his angels, and his demons. If he

won the hearts of the masses by his sentimentality, he was no less famed for his intense understanding of the needs of the people and for his advanced radicalism.

Such he was judged to be in the best informed circles. In 1853 Count von Hubner, one of the chief disciples of Metternich, called Dickens, with good reason, one of the "champions of democracy" in the United Kingdom.

He was flattered, entertained, lionised, in England and in Scotland, where he was held in so much honour that the city of Edinburgh conferred the freedom of the city upon him and hailed him as a hero, although he was not yet thirty years of age.

After a few months of delay and hesitation, during which time his father-in-law died, he decided to sail with his wife for America at the beginning of 1842.

He did this not without regret, for he left behind him in his own country not only a number of very warm friends, but his beloved children, two sons, Charles Cullerford Boz, five

years of age, and his youngest-born, Walter Landor, and two daughters, Mary, later to be known as Mamie, and Kate Macready, aged, respectively, three years and two. It should be noted that Dickens preferably chose for his children's middle names the names of his own devoted companions. It was this same affectionate and faithful Macready who was left to watch over the children during their parents' absence.

We gather, from Dickens's *Correspondence*, his *Notes*, and, more especially, his *Martin Chuzzlewit*, that he also discovered America, or, at least, a certain sort of America.

Yielding to the urging of Washington Irving, whom he met at the home of Lady Blessington, to his own love of novelty, and also to his desire for a glimpse of this valiant young democracy, Dickens sailed from Liverpool. The voyage was extremely unpleasant, for the ship encountered a violent storm, but happily came through without serious damage.

Mr. and Mrs. Dickens were received with

open arms in Boston. Hurrah for the inimitable Boz! Hail to the great champion of liberty! The Americans were all eagerness to initiate this Englishman into all their progress and all their advantages.

At first Dickens was almost worshipped by them. He was besieged by newspaper reporters, he had concerts given in his honour, he was showered with flowers, and surfeited with toasts.

He enjoyed a similar triumph in New York; but before long he could not prevent himself from opening his eyes to certain defects in this American nation whose guest he was; yet it was a purely personal grievance which at last unchained his resentment; little by little he extended his quarrel to the United States as a whole, which, in turn, met him halfway, and not without reason—which did not prevent them, later on, from concluding honourable terms of peace.

He had taken it into his head to defend his copyright and that of his English colleagues in

a land where at that time an artist's property rights were an empty word. They were very far removed, in those days, from the salutary copyright law of the present day.

Dickens had always regarded an author's rights as something sacred; he defended his own, as well as those of others, with a sort of rage, intense bitterness and sarcastic vehemence.

When American publishers pirated his works he judged it necessary to declare himself robbed and to cry the fact aloud, perhaps a little too loud. But Dickens was always as inflammable as he was sincere.

On the other hand, his mercenary claims must doubtless have seemed a little strange to the good people beyond the seas who had hailed him as the noble hero of an idea.

Yet the excessive optimism, the unique patriotism, which he believed that he had discovered in the younger nation, delighted him beyond bounds. Like many other men who are fundamentally kind-hearted and generous, he

surrendered himself to the full violence of his first impressions.

He took a trip across the United States, during which he violently denounced the anti-abolitionists, and did not hesitate to give evidence of his hatred for the slave owners.

It is probable, also, that, after being accustomed to the elegance of certain aristocratic drawing-rooms in London, he was by no means pleasantly impressed by the vulgarity of certain Americans with far more money than education.

"Mr. Hannibal Chollup sat smoking . . . without making any attempt either to converse or to take leave; apparently labouring under the not uncommon delusion that for a free and enlightened citizen of the United States to convert another man's house into a spittoon for two or three hours together was a delicate attention full of interest and politeness, of which nobody could ever tire."

The foregoing passage can be found in *Martin Chuzzlewit,* along with many others of the

same tone. Americans had expected to find in Dickens a person of seraphic temperament, and instead he proved to be a man who combined with genius and certain splendid qualities some rather ugly defects that are common to a good many other men. On the other hand, Dickens had been invited to come across the ocean to see a terrestrial paradise. But he found that up to the present, at least, there was no such thing upon earth. Hence the misunderstanding which was destined to be eliminated only by lapse of time. Meanwhile Dickens was only too delighted to find himself once more on English soil when he arrived in Canada after having stopped to admire Niagara Falls.

He was lionised in Canada, and still more so on his return to England, where, to his inexpressible delight, he found himself once more in his own home in Devonshire Place with his children clasped to his heart. And what a warm heart it was! It was always open to one and all, even at the same time that he was most obstinately tightening the strings of his purse.

His *American Notes,* which were the outcome of his correspondence with Macready and of a sort of journal of his impressions, contained no hint of the quite justifiable campaign which he was carrying on in regard to his copyrights. But he did put into them his reflections and criticisms on America, some of them judicious, some of them cuttingly sarcastic, and nearly all of them strongly prejudiced.

The Americans, furious to find themselves judged inferior to a people whom the great novelist and social reformer had openly ridiculed for their oligarchical cabinets, their parish officials, and the whole assemblage of their social traditions, took vengeance on him by calling him a fool and a liar.

But Dickens was not willing to cry quits. In 1843 he regaled his fellow-countrymen with the first installment of a new novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit,* which, it may be remarked in passing, failed to meet with the success of its forerunners.

Nevertheless, it contains certain types

marked with the seal of his violent, melancholy and ironic genius, types such as the inimitable Mrs. Gamp and Pecksniff, who remains one of the most strongly individualised among all of Dickens's characters. And there are also three others especially deserving of notice, Chollup, Jefferson Brick and Pogram, or, in other words, America and the Americans served up in caricature by Dickens, the prince of caricaturists.

How far did this satire reach? That is what a cool-headed philosopher would ask himself. Might not these arrows which Dickens launched against certain primitive and vainglorious citizens of free and independent America apply in some cases equally well to free and independent England and similar representatives of the Anglo-Saxon race the world over? In any case the Americans themselves were not slow to forget the errors of a great man, while they busied themselves in correcting their own errors and in learning to enjoy the savour of a buffoonery which, from its very

enormity, could give diversion to even the most blasé minds.

Dickens, on his part, made honourable atonement. He maintained the most cordial relations with the celebrated writers of America, and gave Longfellow a most worthy reception at the time of the latter's visit to Europe.

In his *History of English Literature* Taine has powerfully analysed and defined what we may call the apostolate of Dickens.

"All of Dickens's novels," says Taine, "could be summed up in one final phrase, conceived as follows: Be good and love one another; there are no true joys aside from the affections of the heart; sensibility is the whole of man. Leave science to the learned, pride to the nobles, luxury to the rich; have compassion upon humble wretchedness; the smallest and the most despised of beings may alone be worth as much as thousands of the powerful and arrogant; be careful not to bruise these delicate souls which blossom under all conditions, beneath all sorts of raiment, and at all ages. Believe that hu-

manity, pity and pardon are the most beautiful things in human nature; believe that intimate affection, open-heartedness, sympathy and tears are the tenderest joys in the world. To live is nothing; it is a small matter to be powerful, wise and famous; it is not enough to be merely useful. He alone has lived and is a man who has wept at the memory of a benefit that he has rendered or has received."

The foregoing precisely sums up what M. Cazamian, in his learned thesis on the social novel in England, has happily characterised as Dickens's Christmas philosophy—a philosophy which emanates from all his writings, even in the midst of his most grotesque conceptions. In his company we are far removed from the mysticism of Tolstoy, from the revolt of Gorki, and all the theorists of socialism. His is a breath of simple and human tenderness, which pierces the fog, the mystery and the poetic and thoroughly British sentimentality of the *Christmas Carol*, just as it does the works of analogous inspiration which followed it.

Oh, that *Christmas Carol!* What memories it has left with us, even to this day, from the midst of all the reading done in the course of our younger years! We can still see that Christmas night in the city streets, snowy, slushy, and yet tumultuous. We can still see old Scrooge, the avaricious and rich banker, the egoist; we follow him to his home, to his room; he approaches his bed and his easy-chair, . . . and then suddenly there is Marley, Marley's ghost! We shiver even now at the bare remembrance of it. And that detail of the buttons on the back of his coat, visible through the transparency of his immaterial form! And then there are those three Spirits of Christmas, Past, Present and To Come! That of yesterday teaches Scrooge the despair of affections lost through the fault of his egoism; that of today shows him the joy of living on this present Christmas night; and that of tomorrow, terrible in its impenetrable silence, allows him to divine the miserable end that awaits a solitary old miser. And Scrooge awakens. The trans-

formation has been accomplished; Scrooge is joyous, Scrooge is generous, Scrooge has learned to seek happiness solely in the joy of spreading happiness around him!

How grateful we felt towards Dickens when at last we reached the end of the tale, after so many shivers and so many thrills! Even in those days we used to amuse ourselves by seeking for other possible solutions to the stories that we read; but it is the simple truth that we were unable to find for the *Christmas Carol* any other which would satisfy us so well or so completely as that perfectly natural and consoling and joyous ending.

The Chimes also vibrated through our early dreams. But this second tale, with the measureless pity which emanates from it for poverty and sin, with its fantastic intervention of the Bells and their Spirit, with its vision of the unhappy woman about to throw herself into the Thames, caused us the most profound anguish. How grateful we were to Dickens for finally awakening his hero! We felt as though

he had simultaneously awakened us also from a nightmare, and the only memories that we cared to keep were those admirable descriptions of the city seen through a veil of fog.

In 1843 Dickens seemed to have returned to the earlier manner of *Oliver Twist,* giving it, however, a greater charm and amplitude. He always felt most strongly, when he was in London, the suggestive stimulus of the vast city—and he always loved its atmosphere, even when he left it for the purpose of new pilgrimages.

After feasts and banquets, after having received a still insufficient number of bank notes, after having mercilessly prosecuted the imitators of *The Christmas Carol,* collaborated once again, and at far higher rates, on the *Morning Chronicle,* and drawn upon his new publishers for nearly three thousand pounds sterling, he decided to withdraw from this much too engrossing London life, to flee distractions, and take refuge on the Continent.

He informed himself about Italy, through Count d'Orsay and the artist Turner, secured

an experienced courier, acquired a picturesque old stage-coach and a passport, and there he is on his way!

He remembered to take with him his familiar little articles and ornaments, in order that he might work, for this journey was in the nature of an exodus. His wife and sister-in-law accompanied him, as well as the rest of his small family, augmented by a new recruit, Francis Jeffrey; in other words, two daughters and three sons, besides a lady's maid.

They crossed through France and reached Marseilles, where they took the boat for Genoa. There, at first, they occupied the Villa Bagnerello, in the suburb of Albaro, which Dickens referred to in his letters as the Pink Prison; and afterwards magnificent apartments in the Peschiere Palace, splendidly situated among gardens and churches, and facing the matchless splendour of the sea, whose azure waters merge into the azure and serene enchantment of the Italian sky.

Nevertheless, and this remains characteristic

of him, in spite of his *Pictures from Italy,* he thought of little else than London, and continued to work upon his series of Christmas tales, fantastic, lugubrious, radiant, and filled with fog, hail, snow, fear and tenderness.

Poor Toby Veck, in *The Chimes,* which he wrote in Genoa, is even more destitute than Bob Cratchit, the hero of the *Christmas Carol.*

Is there anything more significant to a critic anxious to interpret the real personality of Charles Dickens than to see him, in the midst of orange groves, tracing with the most profound intensity, and, doubtless, many a nostalgic pang, all the anguish and exasperation of the populace in an atmosphere of fog and gloom, as dense and hopeless as that in which he shows us Scrooge, the miser of *The Christmas Carol,* prior to his conversion. Behind the story-teller, eager to lead us through inimitable nightmares, among the Spirits of the Past and Present, we discover the daring social reformer, holding up to scorn the false and injurious forms of philanthropy.

"Put them down, put everything down!" is the burden of the advice of Alderman Cute.

Never has a writer succeeded, as Dickens has, in making his far-carrying voice the sonorous echo of all the other still, small voices that are stifled in darkness and silence. And thus, by the exposure of the fallacy of Cute and his ilk, the question of Christmas assumes formidable proportions.

There is far more of Dickens in this Christmas tale than in his *Pictures from Italy*, which form a record of his travels.

The splendour of the small cities, the white marble of Ferrara, the ardent death-in-life of Venice could not dull his heartache for London. He made a flying visit back there to revive his energies, and also to read *The Chimes* to his friends. He read it, and with such success that it would seem as though all his subsequent numerous public readings were inaugurated by these pleasantly intimate little gatherings at which he sought the approbation of

Forster, Maclise, Douglas Jerrold and especially of Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle.

Carlyle, the bear of Chelsea, constantly exercised a sort of fascination over the mind of Dickens.

Restless as ever, Dickens returned by way of Paris, where before long he was to make an extended stay, and rejoined his family at Genoa, whence he made a number of excursions to Rome, Naples and Florence.

This sojourn in Italy lasted little less than a year. The family all returned to England together, through Switzerland, which delighted the novelist, and Belgium, where Maclise and Forster rejoined their friends. In June, 1845, Dickens was once more enjoying the comforts of his British fireside. The house had necessarily been rented during his absence.

Under the spur of an activity which, almost to the last days of his life, never abated, Dickens conceived the idea of organising an amateur theatrical company. Already, during his sojourn in Canada, he had acted with his wife in

a performance given for the benefit of some charitable purpose.

With his customary intensity he threw himself heart and soul into his new function of comedian, imbuing it with the spirit of true comedy, while his mobile features aped with inimitable mimicry the most diverse physiognomies, according to the parts assigned him. In this way he raised some rather considerable sums to meet the needs of certain charitable institutions in England.

This diversion of amateur acting, into which he had drawn several of his friends, and in which he amused himself quite as much as he amused others, he was destined to revert to again some years later for the purpose of raising the necessary funds for founding a house of refuge for aged and indigent authors.

Wishing, no doubt, to exercise some political influence, and at the same time to realise a long-treasured project, Charles Dickens dreamed of founding a newspaper, the title of which was to be *The Cricket*.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WORKS OF DICKENS

Two scenes from *Bleak House*. *Above:* "The Dancing School."—*Below:* "Mr. Guppy's Entertainment."

Although we never had *The Cricket,* for it never raised its voice in the land, we at least have a new Christmas tale, *The Cricket on the Hearth,* in which, in the humble home of a coachman and a toy maker, we share the lives of John and Caleb.

The paper he had dreamed of appeared at the beginning of the year 1846, but it was destined to make its way in the world under the title of the *Daily News,* and the celebrated novelist was its first editor—during the space of three weeks.

The importance of the position of editor and the salary of approximately ten thousand dollars a year, as well as the opportunity of addressing the public directly every day, were a big temptation. But the position was no sinecure. Far otherwise. Within a few days Dickens had wearied of his duties. Unable to remain contented in any one place, he was already dreaming of a new departure, a second sojourn on the Continent, and a new book, which

later evolved into the voluminous *Dombey and Son.*

This book he wrote at Lausanne, after a stay of some little time in Belgium, Alsace and Germany. He installed himself in a villa overlooking Lake Leman, in company with his family, once more increased by the birth of a son—the fourth—Alfred Tennyson. This same Alfred, whose first and middle names are those of the celebrated poet laureate, settled in after life in Australia, whence he returned only a few years ago. Charles Dickens himself has never yet been so far from us!

He liked Lausanne, as he had earlier liked Genoa. But he had the same haunting longing for London fogs, in spite of the beauty of situation and the friendliness of the English colony, which lavished attentions upon him. He read aloud, with his accustomed talent, the first chapters of *Dombey.*

The publication of a new Christmas tale, *The Battle of Life,* neither added greatly to his reputation nor detracted from it. Before long he

wearied of the comfort of the Villa Rosemont at Lausanne, and of the excursions which he made to Geneva, to the Great St. Bernard and the whole surrounding region.

In Paris he stayed in the Rue de Courcelles, in company with Forster, and became initiated into French life. The gaiety and movement of the City of Light singularly captivated him. He soon came to feel almost at home in it; for did he not actually sign certain letters, subsequent to that date, namely 1846, "a naturalised Frenchman"? And he derived no less pleasure from his second visit, when he returned to Paris ten years later.

At the time of his first sojourn he passed his days in visiting the museums, and the National Library, and at the same time continuing his work on *Dombey and Son*. In the evening he went either to the theatre or to the circus. Pageants and vaudevilles delighted him, too much if anything! He made the acquaintance of the actor Régnier, and consequently attended a performance of *Lucretia Borgia*.

Victor Hugo, who at that time was living in the Palais Royal, received the novelist most courteously when he called upon him. Forster, in his *Life of Dickens,* gives the following interesting account of their meeting:

"Closed that day at the house of Victor Hugo, by whom Dickens was received with infinite courtesy and grace. The great writer then occupied a floor in a noble corner house in the Place Royale, the old quarter of Ninon de l'Enclos and the people of the Regency, of whom the gorgeous tapestries, the painted ceilings, the wonderful carvings and the old gold furniture, including a canopy of state out of some palace of the Middle Ages, quaintly and grandly reminded us. He was himself, however, the best thing we saw. I find it difficult to associate the attitudes and aspects in which the world has lately wondered at him with the sober grace and self-possessed quiet gravity of that night of twenty-five years ago. Just then Louis Philippe had ennobled him, but the man's nature was written noble. Rather under the

middle size, of compact, close-buttoned-up figure, with ample, dark hair falling loosely over his close-shaven face, I never saw upon any features so keenly intellectual such a soft and sweet gentility, and certainly never heard the French language spoken with the picturesque distinctness given to it by Victor Hugo. He talked of his childhood in Spain, and of his father having been Governor of the Tagus in Napoleon's wars; spoke warmly of the English people and their literature; declared his preference for melody and simplicity over the music then fashionable at the Conservatoire; referred kindly to Ponsard, laughed at the actors who had murdered his tragedy at the Odéon, and sympathised with the dramatic venture of Dumas. To Dickens he addressed very charming flattery, in the best taste; and my friend long remembered the enjoyment of that evening."

And Dickens himself referred in the following terms to the same occasion, in a letter to Lady Blessington:

"I was much struck by Hugo himself, who looks like a genius, as he is, every inch of him, and is very interesting and satisfactory from head to foot. His wife is a handsome woman with flashing black eyes. There is also a charming ditto daughter of fifteen or sixteen, with ditto eyes. Sitting among old armour and old tapestry, and old coppers, and grim old chairs and tables, and old canopies of state, from old palaces, and old golden lions going to play at skittles with ponderous old golden balls, they made a most romantic show, and looked like a chapter out of one of his own books."

At this same period, but before his arrival in Paris, he met Baudelaire and also the painter, Stevens, while passing through Brussels.

He once more ran across Lamartine, with whom he had become acquainted at Genoa. The editor of the *Revue Britannique*, Amédée Pichot, assured him of his co-operation in circulating his books. He enjoyed the society of some of the most noted writers of the period,

Dumas *père,* Théophile Gautier, Eugène Sue, and a host of others.

His curiosity led him, among other places, to the Morgue, and also to the public sale of the effects of Marie Duplessis, the famous *Lady of the Camelias,* an event which gave him occasion to laugh, not unkindly, at the emotional nature of the Parisians: "Everything has given place to an event of such importance. At sight of the general admiration and consternation one would think that it was a question of some hero or some Jeanne d'Arc; but the enthusiasm became unlimited when Eugène Sue bought the famous demi-mondaine's prayer-book."

In Paris, just as in his proper domain of London, he wandered from street to street. In the whole air of the people he discovered "a certain something, impossible to describe, which heralds a revolution." A perfectly correct impression, which perhaps at that very moment gave him the inspiration for his *Tale of Two Cities.* But by the middle of 1847 we find him

back in London, where shortly afterwards *Dombey and Son* was published.

Dombey and Son was one of the great successes of Dickens's fruitful career. It has been remarked with a good deal of justice that this novel is the last one belonging to his first manner. *David Copperfield* shortly afterwards triumphantly inaugurated his second. And there would doubtless have been a third and a very marked one, if death had not surprised him before the completion of his very mysterious *Mystery of Edwin Drood.*

But we should always avoid sharp-cut distinctions. It is only too easy to put labels on men and things. It is quite practical from the pedagogic point of view, but it is contrary to reality and to life.

Certainly, even before *David Copperfield,* Dickens was quite human, but he was human in the manner of farce, melodrama and caricature, following certain simple devices and methods of exaggeration. But henceforward, beginning with *Dombey,* he began to adhere

more closely to possibilities, and to choose themes that lie nearer to our own experiences.

Dombey, that solemn and formidable man of business, so harsh towards his wife, so cruel to his daughter, Florence, cherishes for his son and heir a tender affection mingled with the proud hope that he will live to carry on the succession of a house singularly adapted to commerce. The death of little Paul Dombey destroys this hope. In such touches as these the art of Dickens shows a curiously close kinship to that of Balzac. There are, furthermore, in this volume numerous other characters, all perfect in their respective orders, such as that of the sentimental Toots and the aged and gallant Major Bagstock.

From Paris Dickens had written to his friend, Forster: "My passion for the stage has grown in this country where the art of the theatre has really arrived at a state of perfection."

He was no sooner settled once again in England than he busied himself anew with his project of an amateur theatre. His business af-

fairs, thanks to the publication of *Dombey*, were once more prospering, and he was free to give himself up to his favourite hobby, which lent itself to his noble impulses of charity. He became a sort of theatrical manager, and obtained the co-operation of other authors and of artists of such standing as Cruikshank.

It should be noted that Dickens's own choice of plays included the various works of Goldsmith and Bulwer Lytton. On one occasion his name appeared on a billboard advertising a farce by Mark Lemon, which he had rewritten: *Mr. Nightingale's Journal*, and which was produced under the auspices of the Duke of Devonshire; but, in spite of his fine sense of humour and his exuberance, he really never got beyond the amateur stage of acting. He did not work for the theatre; his theatre was the life of the real world.

It is worth noting, however, that his co-operation was the source of big profits: nine performances given in London, at the Haymarket

Theatre, one of which was attended by Queen Victoria, brought in a sum total of nearly thirteen thousand dollars.

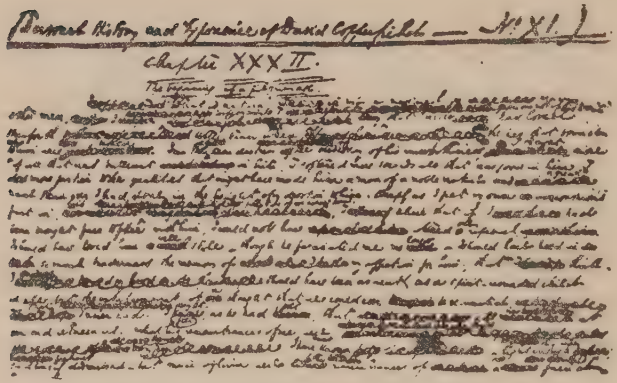
At about this same period he delivered a series of lectures at Glasgow, Leeds and various other cities, and discovered that he had become the idol of the public.

With a dogged perseverance, which in reality was one of his most significant traits, he reverted to his idea of founding a periodical, and thought quite seriously of calling it *Charles Dickens Edited by Himself;* but finally hit upon the attractive title of *Household Words,* which so well embodies the general tendency of his Christmas Tales. Dickens was certainly the great conjurer of the honest and tender intimacies of home.

This time his enterprise succeeded brilliantly; besides, he had surrounded himself with reliable and distinguished collaborators, such as Wills, who undertook the managing editorship, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Martineau,

Wilkie Collins, who was one of his discoveries, and many others.

The success was a lasting one. In 1859, however, the title of the magazine was changed to *All the Year Around*.



Specimen of Dickens's Handwriting
(Fragment from the manuscript of *David Copperfield*)

CHAPTER VI

THE MAGIC LANTERN—WHY, THERE IS UNCLE PUMBLECHOOK—MR. DICK FLIES KITES—RAGS, BOTTLES, FOR SALE! POOR JO TRIES TO TAKE FRENCH LEAVE—MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN . . .

IN all that Dickens wrote, in all that he did, in all that he has left us, even down to the slightest of his notes, signed "A Lost Dog," there is a certain feverish intensity of life which extends to the most riotous buffoonery. In his fertile maturity Dickens possessed an exuberance which may rightly be compared to the somewhat unbalanced phantasy of a mountebank, the exaggerated gesticulations of an acrobatic clown.

All this is quite literally true. While in America he was once struck by the resemblance offered by a row of cottages to the shops in the stage setting of a pantomime. Straightway this

friend of Carlyle, and rival of Thackeray, and one of the greatest of English writers, bounded towards one of the doors, struck several violent blows upon it, and stretched himself at full length on the ground in order that the bewildered occupant of the cottage might stumble over him and fall head over heels. But no one came to the door. So Dickens presently picked himself up again and continued on his way serenely.

It is also related that on another day, or rather night, and this also happened in America, he amused himself and several enthusiastic admirers as well by going from door to door and ringing the bells. In England he showed himself equally fond of rather rough practical jokes and did not hesitate to declare himself madly in love with Queen Victoria.

In point of fact Dickens was, on the one hand, a wonderful English humourist, the descendant of a line of marvellous story-tellers, capable, amid the tingling activities of life, of combining tears and tender smiles and the con-

tortions of strident laughter. He himself was the most amazing of the line, because he was convinced of that strange and profound truth that the wisest men are often the biggest fools.

On the other hand, and this must be insisted upon again and again, Dickens always remained a romanticist. Considered philosophically, he appears to us in the first place as a rather dandified person, with sufficient distinction of appearance and manners to enable him to model himself upon his friend, the Count d'Orsay, the fashionable hero of the hour. But in reality he remained very much a "man of the people," and he was justly reproached for certain habits and defects characteristic of the lower and middle classes that he has so well depicted.

When Queen Victoria conceived the happy thought of wishing to meet Dickens, as one of the men who have done the greatest honour to England, he refused to present himself before her in costume as an amateur actor, yet was quite at a loss to know what garb to assume

that would really be worthy of him and of his works.

But this did not prevent him from deliberately making himself conspicuous by his manner of dress. Although a far less solemn person than Richard Wagner, Charles Dickens also affected vests of velvet, flamboyant waistcoats and hats, and coats cut on French models. He was delighted to have attention paid to his personal appearance, and to have people wonder and admire. This was not a pose in his case. It was quite natural, deliciously and childishly natural.

He was kind-hearted to a point of amazing but lovable weakness. When one of his former secretaries appealed to him for a horse and carriage, on the pretext that rheumatism had made walking impossible, Dickens, without stopping to make an investigation, believed—or pretended to believe—that the man was paralysed, and acceded to his request.

He used to take part in the games and sports of his children. He was not content alone with

showing them the magic lantern, supplementing it with other exhibitions of still more astonishing magic, acting as stage manager for their private theatricals, multiplying travesties, comic imitations, interludes, and antics of all sorts, but he must even learn to dance with them. And one night, literally in the middle of the night, the absurd whim seized him of rising from bed and practising a polka step, so that he might convince his children of his mastery of the art.

Here is the exact truth. He was a marvellous entertainer, and the business of entertaining amused Dickens himself frankly and sincerely, while he was in full possession of his strength. To him the entire world was a stage setting out of fairyland. He called all creation to his aid. He gave consciousness to a tree, to a stone, to any object whatever; the ardent intensity of his life communicated itself to all things outside of him. He felt the need of giving forth joy, generous enthusiasm, happiness. In this sense Dickens's optimism, so

often misunderstood and belittled, contains a certain loftiness and sublimity. The poet in him is eager for the happiness of others, for all others, just as for himself.

Yet Dickens was sufficiently clever as a writer to give the impression when he chose of being sinister. Like David Copperfield's comrade, Traddles, he was quite capable of tracing skeletons across his pages. But this was only one more trick to amuse himself and his readers. There was nothing really sinister in the literary nature of Charles Dickens. With him we are very far removed from the romantic artists of the decadence. His temperament as a writer is sound and salutary.

He could also weep and he knew how to make others weep, because he was spontaneous and emotional and kind-hearted. While he could see and reproduce all the ridiculous foibles of poor humanity, the grimaces and the mannerisms of one and all, at the same time no one surpassed him in reproducing the elements of universal tragedy. Dickens had no need to

make phrases, to chisel polished periods, to drape himself in a fringed tunic, to take refuge in an ivory tower, or to be the mouthpiece of a political party when he wrote. He himself was that creature or that thing which contains so great a sum of burlesque and of pathos, and which goes by the name of man.

"I believe that David Copperfield is a new gospel," declared M. Anatole France. This belief is justifiable. In the season of 1849-50, when Dickens wrote *David Copperfield,* which is generally considered as his masterpiece, he was in the full plenitude of his creative genius and of his maturity, uniting the treasures of secret and profound meditation with the pure gold of noble inspiration.

While we must continue to make special reservations when the question arises whether we are to consider this autobiographic novel as a true autobiography, it remains none the less true that Dickens put himself heart and soul into this joyous and sorrowful book, so full of earthly frailty and celestial radiance.

There was much truth, frightful, unrestrained, sinister or diabolic truth, in such characters as Pickwick, Quilp, Nickleby, and countless other types, down to the slightest silhouette in his farces and his melodramas. But there is quite as much truth in the simpler portrait of Copperfield, Spenlow, and Betsy Trotwood. And the handsome and self-assured Steerforth, who lords it everywhere from his college days onward, down to the time that he elopes with poor little Emily, is also authentic.

"Look, there goes Mr. Micawber . . . No, it is Uncle Pumblechook." It was after this fashion that Dickens recognised his own heroes on the street corner. We can see them still in clothes of a different cut, and under altered conditions.

All this is true of even the slightest sketch in that crowded and infinitely varied *David Copperfield;* every one of them is as sharply cut as the profile on the face of a medal. It is impossible to escape from the hold that they have upon us. Among all the hosts of special and

general types which make up our literary patrimony we hold a special place for our grateful and fond memory of David and Agnes and their friends—perhaps we should also add, even for their enemies.

The fool in *Nickleby,* who fell down the chimney, after the fashion of the sympathetic Don César de Bazan, and who made use of capers as projectiles, is metamorphosed in *David Copperfield* into Mr. Dick. Mr. Dick flies his kites heavenward, covered over with mysterious elucubrations, and he is all the more interesting and appealing. From this time forward the element of mystery in Dickens is tinged with a deeper and more intimate poetry; he retained, on his painter's palette, the same dazzling colours as formerly, but his task of selection has become more masterly. He has learned to add half-tones to his primary colours. And his dominion over us is proportionally stronger.

In Dickens's life, just as in his books, tragic events intruded in grim, relentless fashion.

One evening in April, 1851, he attended a meeting held by an organisation which interested itself in the fate of sick and indigent actors. He had lost his sister Fanny only a few months previously, and his father had just died; nevertheless, he felt that his presence at this meeting was necessary as a matter of charity. He delivered an eloquent address on a theme dear to the hearts of most novelists of the romantic school, in which he himself excelled: namely, the necessity which a comedian labours under, no matter how heavily stricken he may be by destiny, of hiding his anguish, of putting aside his own intimate tragedy, in order to give a conscientious and brilliant rendering of his comic rôle.

Dickens presided at the meeting. In the midst of it word was brought to his friend Forster that Dora Annie, the youngest of Dickens's daughters, whom her father had only just left happily smiling in her crib, had suddenly died without warning. Forster undertook to

break the news to Dickens after the latter concluded his address.

This was a period of grief and mourning for the novelist. Several of his best friends had passed away. After spending some time at the sea-side, he found himself obliged to change his city residence. He removed to a spacious dwelling, Tavistock House, in which he continued to live until 1860. There was much need that it should be spacious. The novelist took possession in 1851, not without some misgivings —for we know whence we come, but we never know whither we are going—and in 1852 his youngest son, Edward Bulwer Lytton, was born.

Meanwhile he had resumed, with a sort of feverish restlessness, the series of his wanderings. It would seem as though his art required that he should seek isolation, and in a sort of half retirement search the unknown pages of his own intimate story, the story which was never to be published, and which was nevertheless the source-book of all his others.

He passed several summers at Boulogne, appreciating the kindly attentions of his landlord, Beaucourt, and readily adapted himself to the agreeable features of French life. A little later he revisited Switzerland and Italy, where he seems to have recovered his old energy; then back again to France and to Paris, where it was his ambition to achieve popularity.

But Paris had changed. It was no longer the City of the Citizen-King. Baron Haussmann already had his project in readiness; and the sumptuous and pleasant life of the Empire, in its most flourishing years, was everywhere in evidence. Dickens was enchanted. He was flattered by the popularity which greeted him. People sought to meet him, and with no little self-complacency he kept a collection of the visiting cards he received, the brief inscriptions on which testified to the esteem in which he was held. To cite only one from among many hundreds: "Jaubert, greetings to the illustrious English novelist, Charles de Kean."

He was accompanied by Wilkie Collins, and

the actor Régnier acted as his guide. The two novelists stayed successively at the Hôtel Meurice in the Rue Balzac and the Champs-Elysées.

How many events occurred within that brief time, and how admirably he succeeded in assimilating and appreciating their delicate or painful interest!

On the opposite side of the Champs-Elysées the horrible discovery was made that the Duchess of Caumont-Laforce had been assassinated. Her hotel was besieged by a host of curious idlers, crowding, pushing, exclaiming, for one spends one's time as best one can.

The Commissary of Police was there, conducting his inquest. Presently a gentleman with an air of unusual distinction approached him and asked:

"Is it true that the Duchess is dead?"

"Alas, yes, Monsieur the Duke."

"Well, so much the better," rejoins Monsieur the Duke, as he goes on his way. This inci-

dent has an exaggerated flavour of the eighteenth century!

Here are other impressions of various sorts. A thief "nabbed" Dickens's watch, which was a present from the queen. But it happened that this thief was a pickpocket of real breeding, and he prided himself upon being an English citizen. As soon as he learned that he was in possession of a watch belonging to the author of the adventures of Pickwick and Oliver Twist, he sent it back, with a graceful note, assuring Charles Dickens of his humble admiration. Dickens, like Grimaldi, was entitled to the gratuitous homage of the whole world, even of thieves!

This was not all. The English novelist, peaceful and aggressive by turns, quarrelled with his concierge, brought a law suit against his landlord, and won his case, as by good rights he should.

He renewed his relations with French men of letters, met Lamartine once again, at the home of Amédée Pichot, and traced a masterly

portrait of the poet, which forms a worthy companion piece to that of Hugo, written at the time of his first visit to Paris.

"He (Lamartine) continues to be precisely as we formerly knew him, both in appearance and manner; highly prepossessing, with a sort of calm passion about him, very taking indeed. We talked of Defoe and Richardson, and of that wonderful genius for the minutest details in a narrative, which has given them so much fame in France. I found him frank and unaffected, and full of curious knowledge of the French common people. He informed the company at dinner that he had rarely met a foreigner who spoke French so easily as your inimitable correspondent, whereat your correspondent blushed modestly, and almost immediately afterwards so nearly choked himself with the bone of a fowl (which is still in his throat) that he sat in torture for ten minutes, with a strong apprehension that he was going to make the good Pichot famous by dying like the little Hunchback at his table."

Then follows an amusing picture of a fashionable dramatist a prey to all the apprehensions of a first performance:

"Scribe and his wife were of the party, but had to go away at the ice-time because it was the first representation at the Opéra Comique of a new opera by Auber and himself, of which very great expectations had been formed. It was very curious to see him—the author of four hundred pieces—getting nervous as the time approached, and pulling out his watch every minute. At last he dashed out as if he were going into what a friend of mine calls a plunge bath. Whereat she rose and followed. She is the most extraordinary woman I ever beheld; for her eldest son must be thirty, and she has the figure of five-and-twenty, and is strikingly handsome. So graceful, too, that her manner of rising, curtseying, laughing, and going out after him was pleasanter than the pleasantest thing I have ever seen done on the stage."

Dickens continued to lead the life of Paris.

He admired Scribe's horses; he also admired the quantity and quality of the cigars of Émile de Girardin, the insolent Lucullus who entertained him at a lavish banquet, through the whole of which he continued to repeat ceaselessly, *"Ce petit dîner-ci n'est que pour faire la connaissance de M. Dickens; il ne compte pas; ce n'est rien"* (This little dinner is given only for the purpose of introducing Mr. Dickens; in itself it is nothing, nothing at all). A second banquet followed close upon the first; but this time Dickens stops short in his account and saves himself the trouble of describing it; the humourist at this point gives place to the moralist: "All this ostentatious opulence saddens me, it saddens me in spite of myself. . . . I think of the source of all this wealth so rapidly acquired, and I seem to see, as in a dream, the despairing faces of all those poor simple wretches from whom their money was taken, in accordance with all the forms prescribed by law."

On another occasion, having made the ac-

quaintance of Mme. Dudevant, better known by her pseudonym of George Sand, Dickens comments upon her as follows:

"Just the kind of woman whom you might suppose to be the Queen's monthly nurse. Chubby, matronly, swarthy, black-eyed. Nothing of the blue-stocking about her, except a little final way of settling all your opinions with hers, which I take to have been acquired in the country where she lives, and in the domination of a small circle. A singularly ordinary woman in appearance and manner."

Undoubtedly this description comes far closer to the good lady of Nohant and author of *La Mare au Diable* than to the author of *Mauprat* and mistress of Alfred de Musset. In like manner, when his imperial, which Ary Scheffer pictured for us during the second sojourn in Paris, became transformed into a two-pointed beard, Charles Dickens, the one-time dandy, came to bear no distant resemblance, save for lack of uniform, to some worthy cap-

tain of the merchant marine. What sad fallings off take place here below!

We must not put too much faith in Dickens's artistic judgments. He applauded Frédéric Lemaître at the Ambigu, in *La Vie d'un Joueur* (A Gambler's Life), and proclaimed him the greatest actor of the century; while he fell asleep over Dumas's *Oreste* and stigmatised the Comédie Française as a gloomy place (perhaps it was in his day, but it is not now). At the same time he went into ecstasies over a piece called *Les Cheveux de Ma Femme.* All, or practically all, that Dickens wrote survives, while the farce which delighted him died a well-deserved death. People of one race do not always admire what is best in another race.

In Paris, as elsewhere, Dickens retained his passionate love for the passing show of the streets. The New Year's booths, along the boulevards, amused him greatly. Paris has kept up this picturesque exhibition, which is so well in keeping with the life of the city and the interests of the small tradesmen. He also mar-

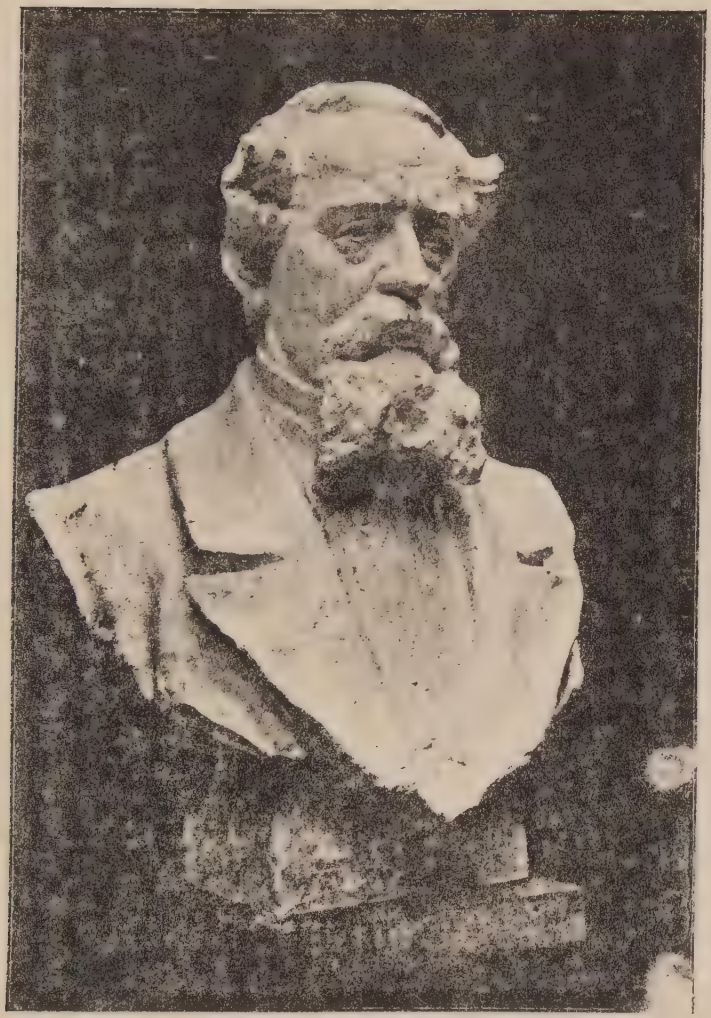
velled at the noise and turmoil of the Bourse, which long custom has taught Frenchmen to look upon without surprise.

Dickens was well received in Paris. The snobbish element would gladly have lionised him, as they would any other distinguished stranger. But he was wise enough to avoid all such importunities.

He was sincerely pleased with the favours shown him, and all the more so because the general public had begun to be familiar with his name. *Martin Chuzzlewit* was then running serially in the *Moniteur*.

After his return home Dickens wrote a preface for the French version of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, dated at Tavistock House January 17th, 1857. It was in the form of an "Address" by the English author to the French public, and is to be found in both languages in the first edition of the *Vie et Aventures de Martin Chuzzlewit*, published in 1858 by Hachette et Cie, No. 14 Rue Pierre-Sarrazin.

In it the author stated that he had for a long



BUST OF DICKENS

This work by the sculptor Taft, executed in 1870, shows us the great and prolific novelist at fifty-eight years of age, a few months before his death.

time past been hoping to see the publication of a complete and uniform translation of his works.

"The present publication," he went on to say, "was proposed to me by Messrs. Hachette & Company, and by M. Charles Lahure, on terms which do honour to their high-minded, liberal and generous character."

In France, as well as in England, Germany and America, Dickens had by no means been accustomed to such scrupulous consideration from publishers in search of success—and profits.

He added, in remembrance of the hospitality he had received:

"I am proud to be presented in this form to the great French people, whom I love and honour sincerely; this people, whose judgment and approval ought to be a goal for the ambition of all who cultivate the art of letters; this people, who have done so much for literature, and to whom literature owes such a glorious name throughout the world."

Bleak House had appeared, and it brought additional fame and fortune.

Dickens could not rise to a greater height than *David Copperfield,* but by combining similar methods with a more direct plot and a more unsparing realism, and with greater technical skill, he did succeed in expressing his hatred of the injustice perpetuated, under diverse forms, consciously or otherwise, by the Skimpoles and Sir Leicester Dedlocks of real life. In the centre of the picture we have the Court of Chancery, a dreadful place. Dickens is always sufficiently exalted to give the impression of writing in a dream or a nightmare. In *Bleak House* the nightmare claims its full rights. Ada, Richard, and Esther pass through it shrouded in heavy shadow. The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce pursues its complicated course in apparently eternal darkness, amid the mournful chorus of birds of prey. The little old lady is forever awaiting a judgment, the Judgment. And she has for her landlord Krook, the rag dealer, whose shop adjoins the Inns of Court,

and who explains as follows his nickname of Lord Chancellor:

"You see I have so many things here, of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbours think, wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchments and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't bear to part with anything I once lay hold of, or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery.

Krook is not only proprietor of a "Rag and Bottle Warehouse," but also proclaims himself a "Dealer in Marine Stores," while further placards announce "Bones Bought," "Kitchen Stuff Bought," "Old Iron Bought" and "Ladies' and Gentlemen's Wardrobes Bought." The whole place is littered over with piles of dirty bottles: "blacking bottles, medicine bot-

tles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles"; and it is these latter which serve as a reminder that "the shop had, in several little particulars, the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law."

We need not waste time over the narrative of Esther, and we care little for the fact that the lengthy story is based upon the ancient love affairs of Mr. Nemo and Lady Dedlock. But the effects which the novelist extracts from it are unique and marvellous, because he no longer makes use of blind chance, but substitutes for it an indescribably minute logic, combined, furthermore, with a vein of lively sarcasm, indignant eloquence, and charity accompanied by a judicial and avengeful retribution.

There is no further room for wonder at Dickens's plots after we have read *Bleak House*. We need not seek to decide whether the tone of it is too exaggerated, as Lord Macaulay thought, or whether Harold Skinpole bears

more or less of a resemblance to Leigh Hunt. But we must continually approve of what that abstract and intellectual critic, Taine, wrote in regard to Dickens:

"There is no other writer who knows so well how to touch and to soften; he makes us weep; that is literally true; before reading him we did not know that we had so much pity in our hearts. . . . The tears which he sheds are real tears, and compassion is their only source."

Let us take an example from *Bleak House.*

Jo, poor Jo, filthy and diseased, an outcast of humanity, feels that he is being tracked and hunted down. He takes flight, for he has lost the only being in the world who felt pity for him, so here we find him like a sick dog, wandering in a foul and infamous back alley known as Tom-All-Alone's.

Dickens understood better than any other the following truth: environments exist through their relation to ourselves, to our state of mind; even considered abstractly, they are our own creation.

Mr. Allan Woodcourt, a charitable physician, has just been ministering to the wife of a brick-layer. The wretched quarter is still asleep, and nothing is stirring.

"Yes, something is! As he retraces his way to the point from which he descried the woman at a distance sitting on the step, he sees a ragged figure coming very cautiously along, crouching close to the soiled walls—which the wretchedest figure might as well avoid—and furtively thrusting a hand before it. It is the figure of a youth, whose face is hollow, and whose eyes have an emaciated glare. He is so intent on getting along unseen that even the apparition of a stranger in whole garments does not tempt him to look back. He shades his face with his ragged elbow as he passes on the other side of the way, and goes shrinking and creeping on, with his anxious hand before him, and his shapeless clothes hanging in shreds. Clothes made for what purpose, or of what material, it would be impossible to say. They look, in colour, and in substance, like a bundle

of lank leaves of swampy growth that rotted long ago.

"Stop him!"

The wretched Jo takes to flight, but he is brought to bay in a blind alley and tumbles down against a hoarding of decaying timber. Mr. Woodcourt recognises him as the youth he had seen at the coroner's inquest. Jo laments and protests. What is to become of such an unfortunate as himself? He has been driven away from everywhere by one person after another. He is nothing but skin and bones. He has lost the one person who would condescend to talk with him and who was good to him. He would gladly have died in his stead. He does not know why he has not drowned himself in the river. No, he does not know why. He does not know anything.

Mr. Woodcourt takes pity on the lad. Jo is lamentable, but he is sincere.

The doctor leads the way. Jo follows, cringes, looks behind him anxiously. He moves painfully, halting and shuffling. "It surely is

a strange fact," Allan tells himself, "that in the heart of a civilised world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog." But it is none the less a fact because of its strangeness, and the doctor does not see what remedy he can offer.

He takes Jo into a breakfast stall, and orders a cup of coffee for him. Jo raises the cup, then sets it back upon the table again. He casts glances around him furtively, like a frightened animal. He is so ill and so miserable that even hunger has abandoned him.

"I thought I was a'most a-starving, sir," he says, "but I don't know nothink—not even that. I don't care for eating wittles, nor yet for drinking on 'em." And Jo stands shivering, and looking at the breakfast wonderingly. The doctor satisfies himself that Jo is ill, very ill indeed. Thanks to his intervention, a former trooper, who keeps a shooting gallery, consents to offer Jo an asylum. Jo accepts passively, dazedly. He feels that he inspires in others an involuntary aversion. What has he in common

with the rest of the world? He is neither man nor beast; how should he be classified? There is no category for him in the whole wide creation.

And here Dickens, with the righteous anger of his big-hearted genius, lays his finger on the festering sores of poor Jo's body, as well as on the festering sores of the social life of the day. Is it possible that humanity, is it possible that England could countenance such shameful conditions? Dickens intervenes. There is no need of invoking solemn and sacred precepts. We have only to look upon Jo, in order to cry aloud with horror and aversion; we have only to hide in part our own immense distress, which emanates from that of Jo, in order to fill to overflowing the phials of our wrath, for the benefit of the culpable and the indifferent.

Let us listen again to Charles Dickens. Is the following a sneer, or is it not rather a sob?

"Joe is brought in. He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs; being wholly uncon-

nected with Borrioboola-Cha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him; native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head there is nothing interesting about thee."

We are far removed, with such apostrophes, from the anachronistic and vain theory of art for art's sake. Yet it is art which illumines this daring, defiant, detailed realism with a dazzling gleam like that of the most powerful Christian orators—like that of the most vigorous French painters of modern social life, from Zola and Maupassant to Lucien Descaves, J.-H. Rosny and Paul Brulat.

And here it is no longer a question of anarchy or socialism. It is rather one of religion, or, better yet, something like a great wave of human and divine sympathy which, through all the fluctuations of human society, maintains its universal and eternal value.

Where may we discover such intense bitterness, combined with such tender sympathy, apart from Dickens? We ourselves thrill in response to his anger and his sadness. His picturesque and satiric sorrow becomes nothing but sorrow, pure and simple, sheer mourning with no pleasure in recording it, and of all his hatred there remains nothing but sheer love!

In order to realise what infinite variety lies within the range of this genius, so responsive, so direct, so destitute of useless subtlety, we have only to compare the death of poor Jo with that of little Paul Dombey and of little Nell, at the same time keeping in mind the fact that he is the creator of a whole world of human beings. It extends from a Pickwick, a Weller, a Toots, a Crummles, to a Guppy and a Simmery. How

many other writers would have exhausted themselves by any single one of these creations!

Let us stoop with Dickens and with the sympathetic Mr. Woodcourt over the final sufferings of poor Jo. Like all popular writers, Dickens makes his characters seem alive by making them talk a great deal. But in his case it is because he himself has heard them talk. There are emotion, terror, despair in each separate word. The infinite symbolism that lies behind the words vastly magnifies their import:

"'Well, Jo! What is the matter? Don't be frightened.'

"'I thought,' says Jo, who has started, and is looking round; 'I thought I wos in Tom-all-Alone's ag'in. Ain't there nobody here but you, Mr. Woodcot?'

"'Nobody.'

"'And I ain't took back to Tom-all-Alone's. Am I, sir?'

"'No.' Jo closes his eyes, muttering, 'I'm wery thankful.'

'After watching him closely a little while Allan puts his mouth very near his ear, and says to him in a low, distinct voice:

"'Jo! Did you ever know a prayer?'

"'Never knowed nothink, sir.'

"'Not so much as one short prayer?'

"'No, sir. Nothink at all. Mr. Chadband he wos a-prayin' wunst at Mr. Snagsby's, and I heerd him, but he sounded as if he wos a-speakin' to hisself, and not to me. He prayed a lot, but *I* couldn't make out nothink on it. Different times there wos other gen'l'men come down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin', but they mostly all said as the t'other wuns prayed wrong and all mostly sounded to be a-talkin' to theirselves, or a-passin' blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin' to us. *We* never know'd nothink. *I* never know'd what it wos all about.'"

Each naïve reflection, far from sounding comic, assumes incredible proportions, as murmured by those dying lips. What follows is pitiable, but in this drama there is a sort of

apotheosis immediately preceding the lofty and heart-rending invocation at the end. Equally with the priest and the poet, the writer who has shed the light of his torch into the gloomy dungeons of law and politics and religion, where innocent childhood and wretched poverty agonise, has the right to address himself to the powerful as well as the humble, to proclaim the truth to them, to give utterance to the cry of reason and the cry of the heart.

"It takes him a long time to say this; and few but an experienced and attentive listener could hear or, hearing, understand him. After a short relapse into sleep or stupor, he makes, of a sudden, a strong effort to get out of bed.

" 'Stay, Jo! What now?'

" 'It's time for me to go to that three berrying-ground, sir,' he returns, with a wild look.

" 'Lie down, and tell me. What burying-ground, Jo?'

" 'Where they laid him as wos wery good to me, werry good to me indeed, he wos. It's time fur me to go down to that there ber-

ryin' ground, sir, and ask to be put along with him. I wants to go there and be berried. He used fur to say to me, 'I am as poor as you to-day, Jo,' he ses. I wants to tell him that I am as poor as him now, and have come there to be laid along with him.'

"'By-and-bye, Jo. By-and-bye.'

"'Ah! P'r'aps they wouldn't do it if I wos to go myself. But will you promise to have me took there, sir, and laid along with him?'

"'I will, indeed.'

"'Thank'ee, sir. Thank'ee, sir. They'll have to get the key of the gate afore they can take me in, for it's allus locked. And there's a step there as I used fur to clean with my broom. It's turned very dark, sir. Is there any light a-comin'?'

"'It is coming fast, Jo.'

"Fast. The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is very near its end.

"'Jo, my poor fellow!'

"'I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I'm

a-gropin'—a-gropin'—let me catch hold of your hand.'

"'Jo, can you say what I say?'

"'I'll say anything as you say, sir, fur I knows it's good.'

"'OUR FATHER.'

"'Our Father!—yes, that's wery good, sir.'

"'WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.'

"'Art in Heaven—is the light a-comin', sir?'

"'It is close at hand. HALLOWED BE THY NAME!'

"'Hallowed be—thy——'

"The light is come upon the dark, benighted way. Dead!"

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.

CHAPTER VII

THE ART OF GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO DICKENS—TWENTY YEARS AFTER—A DELICATE SUBJECT—THE CHASE AFTER DOLLARS—READINGS FROM PICKWICK, DOMBEY AND SON, ETC.

DICKENS was started upon a new path, a most clear-cut and vehement attack upon political institutions and principles. Ought we to see, in this new departure, as has been claimed, a dangerous tendency towards socialism?

Nothing is more absurd than to attempt to codify the works and the personality of this magician. But undoubtedly he had felt the influence of the aggressive theories of his friend Carlyle. Besides, he had acquired a higher consciousness of his authority and his responsibility.

His powers of observing and interpreting re-

mained as keen as ever, but were distinguished in these later years by attacks of nervousness, crises of melancholy and extreme bitterness.

The transition from *Bleak House* to *Hard Times*, which appeared in 1855, is quite natural. Bounderby and Gradgrind are remembered as imposing creations. But the novelist no longer gave himself up to the pleasure of painting vice as he painted virtue, under its more picturesque aspects, and he no longer so willingly coloured ugliness and evil with joyous tints. There is less of the unforeseen and of affectionate hilarity. He intervenes more gravely, although not without acrimony, to demonstrate and to judge.

The lesson of Thomas Gradgrind, in the bare, monotonous and sepulchral school room, is done with a sobriety in which all the details converge towards the final effect; nowhere does the author search to distract or rest our attention by any unforeseen episode or any ironical portrait as a contrast to the teacher. Every

touch bears upon the new conception, the positive conception: "Facts! Facts! Facts!" Imagination must be killed.

But look at little Sissy Jupe! What an extraordinary idea to have transformed her real name of Cecilia in this manner! And why should it ever have occurred to her to wish for a flowered carpet? What a triumph for the gentleman who is cross-examining her when she allows the admission to escape her that in looking at the flowers she would be able to imagine . . .

To imagine! That is precisely what must not be allowed. In all matters you must let yourself be guided and governed by facts! And Dickens, mildly sardonic, says in conclusion:

"Say, good M'Choakumchild. When, from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brimful by and by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within,—or sometimes only maim and distort him!"

Thomas Gradgrind will end by mutilating it

with his principles of utilitarianism and practicality. The application which he makes of it in his own family has lamentable results. His daughter, Louise, becoming repressed and disdainful, marries a *butor*, Bounderby; she suffers in consequence, and, finding no protection from her own conscience, ends by taking refuge in her father's house in order to escape the seductions of another man. Accordingly, in her case, Gradgrind's method of education resulted in a separation by consent, to that gentleman's utter horror. In the case of his son, Tom, the effects are still more serious. The latter has profited by his lesson; he is a gambler, a hypocrite, and an egotist. He has wasted the money which his sister gave him; and he even robs his patron, who turns out to be his brother-in-law, Bounderby, while suspicion falls upon a factory hand, Stephen. The latter is a poor unfortunate, expressing himself with difficulty and unable to see either in life or in the laws of the land anything else than a muddle. And, in point of fact, how should he un-

derstand why a young working girl whom he had married at the outset of life should have deserted him? And, when he discovered that he was loved by another woman, how should he understand that it was impossible for him to get his release from his first entanglement because divorce proceedings cost too dearly? Yet the worthy man is resigned and without revolt. He remains to the last the type of perfect workman. When a strike occurs in the factory he alone sticks to his task, in spite of the boycott imposed by his comrades. And when his employer summons him he defends them, because his sense of what is right tells him that this is his duty.

All this is very fine and very human, without exaggeration of any sort. Such intense gravity dominates the subject that it seems to be taken out of the order of fiction to which Dickens had previously accustomed us; it seems as though at present the author was saying to us: "Have done with laughter! Look, reflect, and think!"

Similarly, in *Little Dorrit*, a work of considerable importance which appeared in 1855, and in which there are some masterly and sharply drawn characters, such as Arthur Clenham, Blandois, and Casby, we no longer find him tracing his portraits with the same light-hearted detachment, the same irrepressible or subtle enjoyment; he strips the masks from vanity and from intrigue, and he applies red-hot iron to social plague spots.

Following the example of Carlyle, he condemns Parliament and the Parliamentarians. In *Little Dorrit* his tirade against the Circumlocution Office is like a flaming sword, and the Barnacles are held up to the scorn not only of all the naturalists of political and social life, but also of the anxious crowd of citizens defrauded of their rights.

As a clear-sighted and from this time forward singularly pessimistic radical, he scourges the aristocracy of politics and its sterile parasitism, the prejudices of the nobility and the stagnant apathy of the people. He hopes at

least that he has communicated to his public some part of the utter contempt which he himself feels for the Houses of Parliament.

Chapter X in *Little Dorrit,* which contains the whole theory of the art of governing, is the utterance of a modern Voltaire collaborating with a Bentham, a Swift, or a Thackeray, while his smile is transformed at times into a gnashing of teeth.

If there is a question of anything to be done, how go to work *in order not to do it? In order not to do it,* that is the question! According to Charles Dickens, the House of Lords and the House of Commons are marvellously expert in solving this problem.

According to this "jolly good fellow," who decidedly made a mistake in becoming a grumbler after his fortieth year, the speech from the throne virtually says at the opening of each session, "My lords and gentlemen, you have a considerable stroke of work to do, and you will please to retire to your respective chambers and discuss How not do do it." And

at the close of each session the speech from the throne says virtually, "My lords and gentlemen, you have through several laborious months been considering with great loyalty and patriotism How not to do it, and you have found out. And with the blessings of providence upon the harvest I now dismiss you."

But are we not even here in the presence of the real Dickens? Even in his most pathetic stories his facetiousness suddenly bursts out of bounds, mighty and undisciplined. And the comedy of politics is by no means the smallest part of the human comedy.

Without such excellent intervention how could we endure the sad visits of little Dorrit and the sinister vision of the prison of the Marshalsea? In spite of Dickens's unquenchable good spirits we are no longer in the bright days of Mr. Micawber and Mr. Pickwick.

Dickens found a throng of fervent and faithful readers. His travels, his charities, the necessities of what he called his public life obliged him to lead a very costly existence.

His daughter, Mamie, has paid a touching tribute to his qualities as a father, his unfailing solicitude for his children's welfare.

The success of *Little Dorrit* and of his periodical permitted him to face the future with some security. In March, 1856, he purchased for a sum amounting to about nine thousand dollars Gad's Hill, the dream of his eager and unhappy childhood, situated in the suburbs of Chatham, overlooking Rochester and its melancholy cemetery.

We will try to visualise him at Gad's Hill, amid the charm of the pretty landscape and the pleasant home circle. But first we must touch upon one of the most delicate points in the whole course of this biography of a writer who was profoundly instinctive and at the same time profoundly industrious. And it is hard to handle it with a sufficiently delicate touch.

In 1858 Mr. and Mrs. Dickens separated.

Is it a sufficient explanation to say that Mrs. Dickens refused to share this exile in the midst of green fields and far from the noise of cities?

Or is it necessary to add, according to a vague and prejudiced paragraph in an American paper, that Dickens made a singular entry to Gad's Hill, between Miss Georgina Hogarth, who was destined to be the companion of his latter years, and a certain young American actress?

We have no need either of imaginary pretexts or of ultra-fantastic interpretations in order to explain what one of his most recent English biographers, Mr. A. W. Ward, has called the open secret of their separation.

In his conjugal relations Dickens seems to have had neither the tender patience of David Copperfield for Dora, nor his veneration of Agnes. But perhaps, on the other hand, Mrs. Dickens was lacking in the happy qualities of an Agnes!

There is no use in turning to the faithful Forster for any accurate details regarding this divorce, which was decisive, final, inexorable, absolute.

Mr. Chesterton offers an explanation with

which we may very well rest content. This critic is a daring thinker, abounding in courage and subtlety, and supplied no doubt with sufficient cynicism not to be afraid of frankness.

In his opinion Dickens suffered from a sort of nervous egoism, was afflicted to a morbid degree with irritability and exasperation; he considers him as a mild or cruel despot, according as he was in good or bad humour. "A mere silly trick of temperament," he says, "did everything that the blackest misconduct could have done. A random sensibility, started about the shuffling of papers or the shutting of a window, ended by tearing two clean, Christian people from each other, like a blast of bigamy or adultery."

Who could doubt the reality of this nervousness, after seeing him give way to his mountebank eccentricities, or feel as keenly as though it were his own the hideous and heart-breaking misery of those disinherited by nature or by the life of the modern city?

One of his secretaries, who took down in

shorthand his articles for *All the Year Round*, has told how he would pause between two phrases, to stroke his hair with a feverish touch, and then go to look at himself in the mirror.

A railway accident, in which he escaped death only by a miracle, was destined, a few years later, in 1865, to complicate his condition, as a result of the nervous shock. His indomitable physical and intellectual energy was purchased at the price of much keen suffering. In this regard we have the formal testimony of his contemporaries, notably that of Harriet Martineau, as well as of all others who knew him well.

His friends, it seems, had foreseen the sad outcome of his married life, which befell in 1858. But Charles Dickens was a sort of popular hero, friend of the weak, the humble, the deformed, anointed poet of the joys of Christmas and of the purity of the British home. People used to stop him in the street; they crowned him with glory and with benedictions. He gave to the whole world the charity of his

pious and redeeming stories. His tenderness incited to meditation and prayer.

Now, the brutal facts of the case: this wife, who had been ten times a mother, repudiated after twenty years, amounted to a public scandal. Whatever may have been the truth regarding the mutual wrongs, the private grievances, the individual weaknesses of character, the three thousand dollars a year allowed to Mrs. Dickens and the excessive part played by Miss Hogarth in the household management, the whole occurrence remains an act of real cruelty, irremediably painful.

Stung by the echoes of incisive comments and the clamours of calumny, the novelist unwisely broke the reserve and the silence which the most elemental common sense ought to have dictated. This industrious man, so worthy at heart, in spite of his exuberance and prodigality, in spite of his instinctive fondness for stage settings, and for a naïve and picturesque vagabondage, could not content himself with merely protesting with his accustomed

vehemence against a few small infamies. He wrote to his friend and "right-hand man," Arthur Smith, a letter containing needless explanations. The latter, in conformity with Dickens's desire, committed the blunder of making this letter public by handing it over to an American reporter, who was fully alive to the requirements of his calling.

To his various vocations of fantastic and sensitive novelist, mordant satirist, experienced editor of a periodical which circulated widely among the lower, middle and upper classes, notwithstanding the scant mercy which he showed the latter, Charles Dickens added still another profession, dating from 1853, a more exhaustive and far more lucrative one, that of lecturer, or, to be more exact, of public reader.

Like his amateur theatricals, his public readings, which grew out of private readings for the entertainment of his friends, were originally intended to aid some charitable or educational movement.

In any case his readings were veritable performances. All his works were really tragi-comedies, with a hundred different acts, and he made them live, or rather relive, before a public that followed attentively these thrilling interpretations of an author by the author himself.

Thus Dickens abandoned himself feverishly to the delight of being idolised by crowds intoxicated by his gestures, his mimicry, and his voice, which, in spite of the regrettable absence of the phonograph, must have founded some valuable traditions in regard to certain ones of his favourite characters.

From 1858 onward—the year of the divorce—he acted his books, so to speak, regardless of the opinion of Forster, who condemned the enterprise as little in keeping with his dignity as a man of letters. But it brought him in from two thousand to twenty-five hundred dollars a week, from the outset of his first series, in Scotland.

It is easy to imagine how the business man-

agers, the cleverest theatrical promoters, besieged him with offers! And in consequence we see Charles Dickens engaged as a star attraction for long tours with contracts at two and three hundred dollars a night. From city to city, from London to Liverpool, and Glasgow and Leicester, throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain, he called forth tears and laughter by his readings, just as he had formerly called forth tears and laughter by his writings.

Indefatigably, despite the travelling, despite the shock caused by the railway accident which left him for a time shaken and trembling, in spite even of the chronic affection of the heart which was destined eventually to cause his death, he continued to repeat his various rôles, into which he flung himself with the prodigal zeal of a child, of an actor avid of applause, or of a great and emotional genius.

Nothing stopped him, neither hemorrhages nor secret sufferings. Was he driven by necessity? He was still burdened by all the cares

of his family. Or was it cupidity? He knew the value of money, and he used it for the benefit of others as well as for himself.

As a matter of fact, he continued to exercise his profession of universal entertainer chiefly from a confused desire to remain in the full enjoyment of chimerical youth, and of the faith which he had possessed in the springtime of life, despite the melancholy weariness of autumn time and of dead dreams scattered like withered leaves.

And, besides, he was desirous of achieving complete independence so that he might finish his allotted task on earth in peace.

Accordingly, he thought quite seriously of undertaking a series of readings in Australia, where one of his sons was living. Yet he had no need of becoming a prospector for gold, for was he not himself a sorcerer who could conjure up a cloud of golden illusion to hover over the sombre drama of life?

Meanwhile he sailed for the United States towards the close of the year 1867, accompanied

by George Dolly, who has consecrated to him a volume of touching and curious memories, and who shows him to us dancing to the music of bagpipes to entertain his companions, in spite of his own frail physique. The anger and indignation of Americans were no longer anything but a vague and far-off memory. The free and independent writer and the free and independent republic had only to fall into each other's arms.

And, in point of fact, Charles Dickens was borne aloft to the skies upon colossal piles of dollars. When Americans espouse the cause of arts and letters they adopt no halfway measures. Dickens had had flamboyant billboards prepared, more dazzling than his own pale waistcoats and sensational neckties. But it soon proved that a loud beating of drums was unnecessary.

It would have been most ungracious on the part of Dickens not to have recognised the great progress which had taken place in the United States. Houses were sold out in advance, and

checks and bank notes showered in. He gave his readings in theatres and clubs and churches. His audiences never wearied of the mighty deeds of Mr. Pickwick and the sorrows of Little Dorrit any more than they did of Mr. Dombey and the *Christmas Carol*. The author could easily console himself for having been so long defrauded of his copyright. Inimitable reader that he was, he cleared a profit somewhere in the neighbourhood of a hundred thousand dollars during this single visit of four or five months.

In going from place to place he suffered from the cold—and, it might be added, from heat also, for he narrowly escaped with his life from two conflagrations. Here and there, in the newspapers, a few hostile comments occurred; but no less a personage than President Johnson himself took pains to assure Dickens of the esteem and admiration which he shared, not only with the select few, but with the great general public of the new world.

At the close of enthusiastic dinners and re-

ceptions, and after leaving the footlights or the private drawing-rooms, Dickens found himself fighting a hard fight against bronchitis and fainting fits. The favourite beverage of the Rocky Mountains, composed of snow, brandy and rum, in no wise diminished his sufferings or his lameness.

Who knows whether, in the midst of this very material and almost heroic glory, he did not sometimes wish, in his weariness, that he was dreaming beside the chimney corner in the comparative peace of his own home, watching the embers whiten and die out, and that he might, in this way, close his existence like the closing pages of his novel, *Hard Times?*

CHAPTER VIII

CHARLES DICKENS, ESQ., OF GAD'S HILL, ENGLAND—THE MAGICIAN IN SOLITUDE—THE TOMB OF A BIRD—AFTER THE CENTENARY, THE APOTHEOSIS

NOT far from Falstaff's inn and from the road to Dover, which is traversed by motley beggars and shabby and threadbare gentlemen who seem to have stepped straight out of one of Charles Dickens's own novels, we reach his favourite retreat, Gad's Hill.

The reveries of a solitary pedestrian wander from Gad's Hill over landscapes brushed in by nature after the manner of Turner, and attractive woodlands known as Cobham Woods; there, in the near distance, flows the Medway, and, further off, the proud Thames. The castle and cathedral of Rochester, in the distance, add their darker note to the sombre verdure and the horizon of grey sky shading to violet.

Thanks to the obligingness of a French serving maid, much like that Ursule with whom her master used to joke so amicably, we are enabled to proceed all the way to the red brick house itself, with its triple windows opening upon opaque masses of green.

From all the trees of various species arise the songs of birds, like hymns to the beauty and magnificence of created nature. But the most intelligent of all these birds was Dick, the novelist's favourite pet and as dear to him as Grip had formerly been. After having long glorified the mysteries of nature, its little ephemeral voice became extinct after one last chill. Dickens erected a little tombstone with an epitaph over the grave, which was kept fresh and flowering.

Let us use a certain amount of discretion in approaching the famous writer. On one occasion a visitor who had succeeded in gaining admission delivered himself of the following profitless discourse:

"Your glory and the universal sympathy

which you inspire probably expose you to innumerable importunities. Your doors must be constantly besieged. You doubtless receive daily visits from princes, scientists, statesmen, authors, artists, and even fools."

"Yes! Even fools, fools, fools!" vociferated Dickens. "They are the only people whom I find amusing!" And he brusquely ushered out his visitor, who was stupefied by such a reception and such gesticulation.

Let us avoid a similar fate in order that our visit may be more profitable. And let us make use of a few enlightening details furnished by M. Maurice Clare.

He tells us that Dickens was a man of medium height—to be more explicit, he is said to have measured five feet five inches—with a brown mustache and tufted beard, and his hair brushed back from his forehead after the manner shown in the portrait by Frith. His face had certain metallic gleams in it. It was a face of steel, to borrow the expression used by Mrs. Carlyle.

As a matter of fact, while he possessed a unique power of impressionability, it was not equal to his power of endurance. A mere nothing seemed to touch and hurt him. And yet nothing seemed able to undermine his strength, his powers of resistance. He remained upon his feet until the very end.

Dickens used to delight to come out of doors into his garden and inspect his geraniums, for he adored exuberant colours, just as he did soft, shimmering fabrics and all resplendent things. He would stop to inhale the fragrance of his syringas and lose himself in contemplation of his two majestic cedars. His soul sought communion with that all-pervasive and infinite soul of nature. And his eyes glistened at sight of all the marvellous splendour of the summer landscape.

He would then cross the highway without leaving his own property—for he crossed underneath it. There was a tunnel which led him, safe-guarded from unwelcome intrusion, to what he called his wilderness, where, in the

midst of a miniature forest of exotic plants, shrubs, flowers and foliage, was the Swiss châlet which had been sent by Fechter from Paris.

Here, on fair days, was his retreat. No less than five mirrors hung in the châlet, reflecting the flowers and butterflies, the wide stretching fields and close-trimmed hedges, the woods and the streams.

Before setting to work this man, who, in spite of his excitability and his excesses of dejection and of rage in the presence of bereavement or oppression, was minutely methodical, must needs arrange before him all his cherished familiar little objects which had come to be an essential part of his boisterous and extravagant life. They included a paper cutter of considerable dimensions, a group of dogs, frogs fighting a duel, and a rabbit sitting on a golden leaf. Then Charles Dickens would begin to work, and from that moment he lived in an enchanted world.

After the *Tale of Two Cities*, a novel of rare quality, which appeared in 1859 and in which

he emulated Carlyle's attempt to explain the French revolution on the ground of poverty, hunger and class antagonism, he published *Great Expectations* and the *Uncommercial Traveller.* In these volumes he kept up to the height of his own standard, but with a certain colder gravity and an impressive authority in the profound analysis that he makes of the moral hesitations of Pip.

Here the interest no longer depends upon the intricacy of the plot, which is reduced to the slightest sort of connecting thread. But the hero of *Great Expectations,* at war with his own emotions, is all the more poignant and true. At first, while still a lad, he is hesitating between the simplicity of a blacksmith's life and the luxurious instincts awakened in him by a rich old maid who is pleased to give him hospitality. Later on, when a young man, he comes into possession of property, the source of which he does not know. Here he is wealthy! Can you imagine what will happen to an uncouth young fellow who suddenly finds himself

in possession of a fortune? A fortune? Yes, and all the ills which follow in its wake! And defects of character besides! Pip soon shows that he has forgotten all that he owes to the blacksmith, Joe Gargery, who brought him up, ingrate that he is! But before long remorse enters his heart, for at bottom he has an honest soul. Ill luck—or should we not rather say destiny?—is about to restore him to himself. All of Pip's wealth leaves him just as it came: what he thought that he owed to the munificence of the rich old maid was money stolen by an escaped convict whom he had formerly aided. With the convict safely back in jail, Pip becomes the Pip of former days, and he takes up his old life like a sensible lad, recovering at the same time his mental equilibrium through the healthful discipline of toil.

Estella and Joe Gargery take their respective places side by side with Pip in the bright and sombre gallery of Dickens's characters, just as Bradley Headstone, in *Our Mutual Friend,*

takes his between Lizzie Hexham and Eugene Wrayburn.

On his return Dickens resumed his former occupations, the editing of his periodical, and in spite of his physical weakness a new series of readings, in which he continued to exhibit alternately his powers of humour and pathos, principally in a fragment taken from *Oliver Twist*. In 1869 and 1870 he gave his farewell reading, not without a certain melancholy. He had lost his brother, Frederick, with whom he had frequently shared his profits. One of his sons had died in India and another was living a very long way off. But Mamie, his beloved and cherished daughter, remained to him. Yet what consolation could be found for all the sorrows of earth, aside from the contemplation of nature and the privilege of writing books which to the very end keep up the illusion of life?

Abandoning his London residence in Hyde Park Place, Dickens took refuge at Gad's Hill, where he passed his mornings in the solitude of the Swiss châlet, covering page after page with

his fine, close writing, overladen with corrections and erasures. These pages were to give a final proof of his creative genius, for they constituted the utterly new manner of his *Mystery of Edwin Drood.* What delightful touches we have in the personage of Mr. Sapsea, and in the vigorously drawn portraits of Crisparkle and Honeythunder! And what lavish energy went into the grey and sombre tones of the pictures that unfold this enigmatic history, the key to which is missing since it remained unfinished. It is true that a certain American claimed that Dickens's spirit dictated the second part of the book to him in 1873, but this is small consolation.

After the daily session of work, which usually lasted three hours, Dickens returned leisurely to the house and felt in the letter box, which was situated in the main hall, hung with pictures by Hogarth.

Then the novelist would go the rounds of his domain. He felt the need of seeing that everything was in its appointed place and in perfect

order, not only in the drawing-room, the library, the bed chambers, where perfect comfort held sway among sofas and rocking chairs, but also in the kitchen, in the garden. His magnificent St. Bernard, Linda, often accompanied him, and would pause when he paused. He lingered over his flower bed, in which the different colourings mingled and blended. Dickens, the magician, felt the need of resting his eyes from time to time on this fairy-land radiance, in order to forget the sombre pictures of his own dramas.

At times the colour schemes of these flower beds were as strange and eccentric as the adventures of his heroes and even as life itself.

No servants were to be seen at Gad's Hill excepting at meal time. Breakfast took place at nine o'clock, and was a joyous family reunion. In the neighbourhood of two o'clock luncheon was served, and there were always a few pleasant guests, eager to amuse or enrich themselves by contact with a man of such warm cordiality, such unforeseen eloquence, so be-

wilderingly fertile in jokes and so likely to burst forth with sudden explosions of impatience and anxiety. Among these guests should be mentioned as frequent visitors at various different periods: the artist, Stone; the novelist, Wilkie Collins; Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle, Albert Smith, James White, and his biographer, Forster.

Hans Christian Andersen once said, "Take all that is best in the works of Charles Dickens, shape it into the image of a man, and you will have Dickens himself."

Excellent, admirable talker though he was, he was an equally good listener, and singularly sympathetic. He seemed, however, to avoid controversies, he never talked of his own work, he exerted himself above all to be agreeable and to amuse. Among his intimate friends he was a marvellous companion. It was nothing unusual, within the strictly home circle, for this dignified, elderly gentleman, whom an outsider might have mistaken for a sea captain off duty, taking a sort of Sunday rest, to become once again the irrepressible Dickens of earlier days.

They lived well at Gad's Hill, although, in his later years, the novelist himself was contented with bread, fruit and a glass of beer. But the table was always covered with flowers, and heaping platters were passed around.

Sports were held in honour, although the master of the house, weary and somewhat lame, preferred the simpler exercise of walking, and was glad to slip away and ramble across country.

"I am incapable of remaining in any one place," he said to Forster. "If I could not walk fast and far, I should explode!"

Nevertheless, in the midst of the tenantry, who adored him and hushed their noise so that he might have the tranquillity that was favourable for the ripening of his thoughts, he used to preside over their games, and would fling open the gates of his park to the general public, among whom certain admirers who had come from afar were often glad to slip in unknown.

Among other amusements at Gad's Hill ball

and bowls were played upon the lawn; and happy hours were passed in the billiard room, which was often a gathering place in the evening.

Dickens was usually glad to join in the children's games, though at times he preferred to shut himself up in the seclusion of his Swiss châlet. When evening fell he would light a cigar and start in to make an inspection of his domain. He retired at the hour prescribed to go to rest. "To rest!" he wrote with a touch of irony. "There is no such thing in life for a good many people!" He himself hardly ever rested.

In June, 1870, after his last readings and the renewal of his favourable contracts with Chapman & Hall, Dickens found himself back at Gad's Hill. Beneficent summer smiled upon his own troubled and desolate autumn.

Dickens was ill. He was unwilling to believe altogether in his illness, but it refused to forget him, and he continued to fail. Nevertheless, he busied himself, together with his daughter

Catherine, with supervising the building of a conservatory opening out of his library. He worked over it with obstinate persistence. Suddenly he was stricken down with an attack of paralysis. His sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, attended him in his last moments.

Dickens had always wished to die at a single stroke, felled like a mighty tree by a thunderbolt. And this was the way that he did fall, never to rise again, in the midst of the performance of his daily tasks. Nature had been indulgent in granting this sudden end to one who had throughout his life been in a certain sense a force of nature.

Dickens died June 9th, 1870. On the 14th of June he was buried without pomp at Westminster. Dr. Jowett delivered his panegyric in the midst of that solemn abbey. The queen expressed regret at his demise. And all England wept.

At the doors of one of the London theatres a little girl, all in rags, inquired of the passers-by:

"Is it true that Dickens is dead? And is Santa Claus going to die next?"

She did not understand that Dickens had only entered upon a long exile, and that nevertheless he would still dwell among us all as a fraternal consolation and an eternal hope.

Yes, Dickens survives. He is great among the greatest, in spite of the perfection of some and the sovereign ability and refinement of others. His recent centenary showed how many echoes he still awoke in English hearts and among all those who search in books for the joy, the pride and the sadness of life.

He divided his estate among his wife, his children and Georgina Hogarth. Forster was appointed executor of his will. The copyright interests were naturally greatly divided. The English laws could protect them only for a comparatively short time.

Accordingly it is scarcely surprising, although painfully sad, to read the following letter addressed by one of Charles Dickens's grand-

daughters to the Committee on the Centenary Celebration, in December, 1911:

"My father died fifteen years ago, at the age of fifty-nine years. The printing-house which he had founded had not been a success, and at his death he left his wife and his five unmarried daughters penniless. My mother obtained a pension of one hundred pounds from the government, and when she died that pension continued to be paid, divided into four parts among my four sisters, who received twenty-five pounds apiece. Two of these four sisters, whose health is frail, earn a meagre pittance, one as teacher in a public school, the other as housekeeper in a home for Hindu children; the third is out of work, and has nothing to live upon except her pension; the fourth has an office position. As for myself, who am supposed to have been successful, I have been for twenty years at the head of a copying bureau. I have worked so hard that twice already I have had serious attacks of nervous prostration, and nothing could restore me to health short of six

months of absolute repose. Not one of us has been able to put aside a penny of savings. So it is quite evident that our condition borders upon indigence. I am absolutely certain that, if our grandfather were still alive, he could not disapprove of this confession of poverty that is forced from us." Happily, the initiative of Lord Alverstone prevented this appeal from remaining without response.

If Pascal has established in an impressive manner his theory of the greatness and the lowliness of human beings in the order of creation, Charles Dickens, without rising to the dignity of a system, and simply by his ardent contemplation of people and of things, has made us see that there is just as wide a difference between big souls and little souls among the lowly as among the lords of the earth.

A human being is a singular mixture of the splendid and the atrocious; good and evil are not easily distinguished behind the habitual outward appearance, behind the grimace and the vacant stare which only too often hide from

the simple spectator the obscure and impenetrable traits of character.

There is only one other thing in Dickens which surprises us to an equal extent with his bewildering hilarity, and that is his luminous sagacity. He has shown us that the splendour of the soul, its pure serenity and unsullied delicacy of sentiments may dwell within physical ugliness, deformity, outward coarseness, the immaturity of childhood, and even poverty!

We readily forgive people for being poor, if they are either alarming or comical. Dickens has chosen to show us types of this sort, and with an astonishing clear-sightedness. He has constantly entertained us, in order constantly to point out and make us understand the flagrant injustice of the conditions and institutions here upon earth.

The spectacles afforded by his marvellous magic lantern are innumerable and inexorable. Thanks to him, we participate in the paradise and the inferno which exist side by side in his

great English city, and, for that matter, almost everywhere in the world.

We need not trouble ourselves too far as to errors, vulgarities, conventions and blunders. Quintilian once said that Homer himself sometimes nodded. It might even have happened that he nodded very often; nevertheless he would still be Homer.

After the Odyssey of the immortal Pickwick, Dickens has left us an entire Iliad of heroes, British all of them, but human none the less.

When we have come to know them, we can no more spare them than we could the heroes of Shakespeare, or Molière, or Balzac.

Charles Dickens is forever sacred to us, doubly sacred, because he remains so near to us, in his small and at the same time colossal universe, brilliant yet lugubrious, sumptuous yet morose, with its double radiance of immortal Art and immortal Kindliness.

THE END